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**Briefing Paper**

Strengthening  
Democracy Desk

January 2026

# Participatory and Deliberative Democracy in the Digital Age

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## Executive Summary

This briefing paper examines options for the future of participatory and deliberative democracy in an ever-changing digital landscape. Taking citizens' assemblies as a model of participatory and deliberative democracy, it highlights their ability to improve accountability and their educative effect on citizens, both in terms of political knowledge and efficacy. Examining case studies of in-person citizens' assemblies from across the world, it identifies that successful citizens' assemblies have a specific remit, are commissioned by decision-makers and – where dealing with morally controversial issues - should also incorporate wider public engagement through consultations or referendums to ensure democratic legitimacy. The paper also indicates three challenges facing the contemporary practice of in-person citizens' assemblies: their cost, other resource constraints that prevent the establishment of a series of focused assemblies, and a lack of inclusiveness through participant self-selection.

Given this, the paper makes the case for the increased use of deliberative technology, utilising online submission platforms as well as machine learning and natural language processing to replace or supplement in-person citizen participation and deliberation. It makes three major recommendations:

1. Public decision-makers and large membership organisations should introduce small-scale pilots of participatory and deliberative democracy using open-source technology to build up the currently nascent evidence base in this field.
2. Focused and specific issues should be chosen for participatory and deliberative processes to maximise the likelihood of producing actionable recommendations.
3. Decision-makers should commission independent participant evaluations of such deliberative processes to identify points of success and lessons learnt for future processes.



## Introduction

In February 2024, Sue Gray, who was then Chief of Staff to Keir Starmer, suggested that if elected to government, Labour would introduce citizens' assemblies into the UK.<sup>1</sup> This would shake up the UK's predominantly representative democratic landscape by exploring mechanisms of deliberative and participatory democracy. Scholars and policymakers are responding to the current crisis of trust in democracy through innovations from sortition to crowd-sourced citizens' initiatives and online petitions to AI-facilitated mass consultation processes. Questions about alternative democratic models are pertinent across the world. In an established representative democracy such as the UK, designers seek to respond to the disproportionate composition of the current House of Commons,<sup>2</sup> the archaic nature of parliamentary procedure and lack of public legitimacy of the House of Lords.<sup>3</sup> Other countries such as India already supplement parliamentary systems at national and regional levels with participatory and deliberative methods. The modern *gram sabha* in India's rural areas, for example, assembles all members of a village to reach consensus on local issues,<sup>4</sup> yet India's urban centres have no equivalent.

Data from the OECD suggests a growing interest in deliberative democracy across its member countries, with a total of 733 representative deliberative processes between 1979 and 2023 across 34 countries.<sup>5</sup> There have reportedly been 15 national-level citizens' assemblies on climate change alone in the last five years,<sup>6</sup> and issues of the environment and strategic planning have been the most popular focus points for the deliberative exercises listed in the

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<sup>1</sup> Tevye Markson, 'Labour Would Introduce Citizens' Assemblies, Sue Gray Says', Civil Service World, 19 February 2024, <https://www.civilserviceworld.com/professions/article/labour-plans-citizens-assemblies-sue-gray>.

<sup>2</sup> Pravar Petkar, 'The Democratic Implications of the 2024 Labour Landslide', International Centre for Sustainability, 12 July 2024, <https://icfs.org.uk/the-democratic-implications-of-the-2024-labour-landslide/>.

<sup>3</sup> UCL Constitution Unit, 'Public Wants House of Lords Reform to Go Further: To Limit Appointments and the Size of the Chamber', The Constitution Unit, 30 June 2025, <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/constitution-unit/news/2025/jun/public-wants-house-lords-reform-go-further-limit-appointments-and-size-chamber>.

<sup>4</sup> Ramya Parthasarathy and Vijayendra Rao, Deliberative Democracy in India, Policy Research Working Paper 7995 (World Bank Group, 2017).

<sup>5</sup> 'Innovative Public Participation', OECD, accessed 3 September 2025, <https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/sub-issues/open-government-and-citizen-participation/innovative-public-participation.html>.

<sup>6</sup> Democracy:Differently, Graham Smith on Citizens' Assemblies, 27 August 2025, <https://democracydifferently.org/434-2/>.



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OECD's database.<sup>7</sup> Well-known examples of citizens' assemblies – one specific form of participatory and deliberative democracy – include the 2004 British Columbia citizens' assembly on electoral reform, and the 2018 Ireland citizens' assembly which eventually led to the repeal of Ireland's constitutional prohibition on abortion.

Interest has also grown in how emerging technology – including generative AI – can facilitate citizen deliberation and participation. Perhaps the most well-known example of 'digital democracy' is the deployment of the Pol.is platform in Taiwan to reach consensus on Uber licensing. British think-tanks Demos and New Local recently announced a joint project to pilot deliberative technology in two local councils in England on the issues of adult social care and urban planning.<sup>8</sup> As countries across the world grapple with the challenges of the twenty-first century, questions remain about how current democratic models of governance can adapt through both in-person and technology-driven participation and citizen deliberation.

Against this background, this briefing paper surveys options for participatory and deliberative democracy in the current digital age. Section 1 outlines the importance of participatory and deliberative mechanisms in strengthening current representative democratic systems. Section 2 explores the use cases for citizens' assemblies and some of the challenges in their implementation, considering usage in respect of ordinary policy matters, morally controversial issues, and issues of constitutional change. Section 3 examines case studies of technology-driven participatory and deliberative democracy from across the world, considering the extent to which technology can overcome some of the challenges highlighted in section 2. The paper thus sets out the scope for the effective uptake of participatory and deliberative democracy – both in-person and through digital platforms – in the current evolving landscape.

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<sup>7</sup> OECD, 'Innovative Public Participation'.

<sup>8</sup> The project has received €1 million in funding from Google: see 'Waves: Tech-Powered Democracy', Demos, accessed 25 August 2025, <https://demos.co.uk/waves-tech-powered-democracy/>.



## **1. Participatory and Deliberative Democracy: What and Why?**

Most democracies worldwide are representative, consisting of an elected national legislature and in many countries, a directly or indirectly elected president. Participatory and deliberative democratic mechanisms offer distinct means of translating public opinion into policy. This section identifies mechanisms of participatory and deliberative democracy, arguing for their benefits in a sustainable democracy.

### **1.1. Understanding participatory and deliberative democracy**

Participatory democracy calls for citizens to directly engage in the determination of policy decisions, rather than leaving these up to the representatives to whom they delegate responsibility at election time. As a response to the liberal model of representative democracy, it is thought to be more inclusive of socio-economic groups that might not otherwise participate, and has an educative effect on citizens.<sup>9</sup> Elstub highlights that for some, it is also a "more authentic" interpretation of democracy,<sup>10</sup> though recent direct democratic experiments such as the 2016 EU referendum in the UK demonstrate the difficulty of articulating exactly what policy options the electorate prefers. Typical examples of participatory democracy include participatory budgeting, town hall meetings, citizens' assemblies and public consultations. This includes mechanisms where citizens may participate *en masse*, as well as those where a representative sample of citizens act on behalf of the whole citizen body.

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<sup>9</sup> Stephen Elstub, 'Deliberative and Participatory Democracy', in *The Oxford Handbook of Deliberative Democracy*, ed. Andre Bächtiger et al. (Oxford University Press, 2018), 190–91.

<sup>10</sup> Stephen Elstub, 'Deliberative and Participatory Democracy', 189.



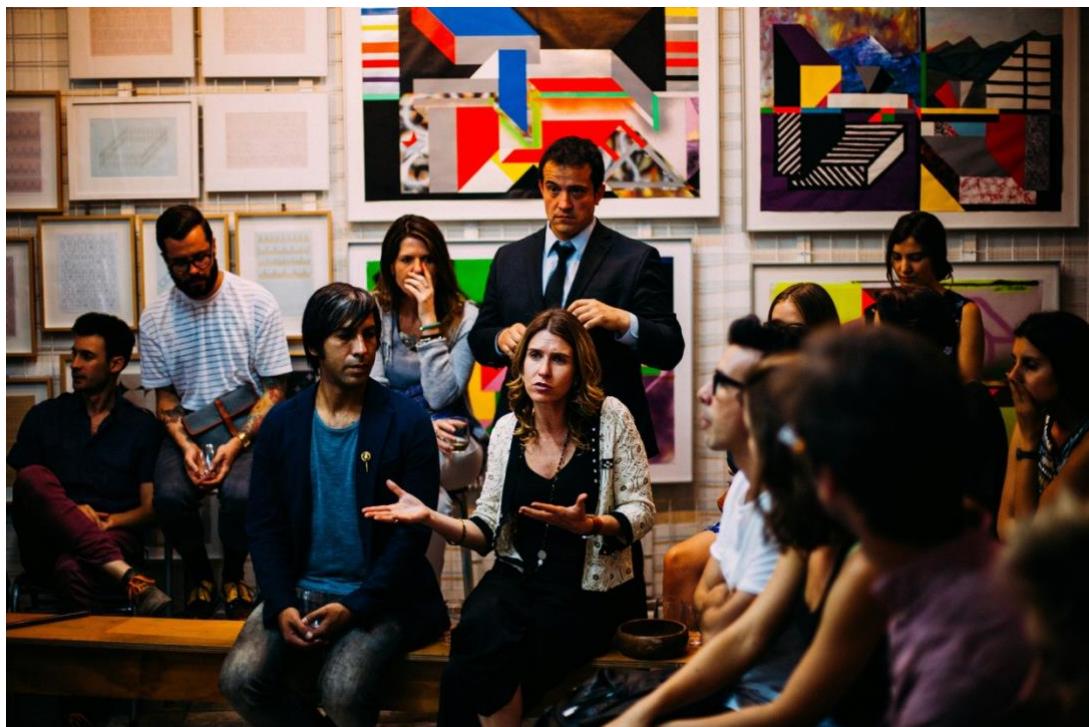


Figure 1: A group of people engaged in dialogue

Deliberative democracy focuses on collective and inclusive forms of reason-giving for decisions that give a voice to all those affected and all the relevant positions that can be taken on the issue at hand.<sup>11</sup> Democratic deliberation may take place within a legislature or in a participatory setting such as a citizens' assembly. The latter – a participatory deliberative model of democracy – has become increasingly popular, though Pateman suggests that participation and deliberation are each valuable for their own reasons.<sup>12</sup> Citizens' assemblies and citizens' juries are both participatory and deliberative, assembling a randomly selected but demographically representative sample of citizens to deliberate upon an issue and provide recommendations to decision-makers. As one of the most popular forms of participatory and deliberative democracy, citizens' assemblies will be explored further in the sections that follow.

<sup>11</sup> Stephen Elstub, 'Deliberative and Participatory Democracy', 191–92.

<sup>12</sup> Carole Pateman, 'Participatory Democracy Revisited', *Perspectives on Politics* 10, no. 1 (2012): 7–8, Cambridge Core, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592711004877>.

### 1.2. What do citizens' assemblies involve?

Citizens' assemblies usually operate over several days (often weekends) and can be held in-person or online. They follow a three-stage structure:

- 1. 'Learning' phase: members receive expert presentations on the topic and can ask questions to clarify their understanding.**
- 2. 'Deliberation' phase: members are broken up into small groups to discuss focused questions relating to the topic.**
- 3. 'Decision-making' phase: members vote on recommendations that they have been tasked with formulating.**

The learning phase always comes before the deliberation and decision-making phases, which may be amalgamated. In the UK Climate Assembly (2020), for example, decision-making was interspersed with deliberations on the third, fourth and fifth weekends. Citizens' assemblies may also involve members receiving and engaging with public opinion. The 2004 British Columbia Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform, the first such exercise to take place, had a dedicated public hearing stage with fifty sessions conducted across the province. In the 2018 Ireland Citizens' Assembly on abortion, members considered public submissions in the learning phase. In the 2020 French Citizens' Convention on the Climate, external contributions were sought through an online platform called Decidim.

This three-stage structure distinguishes citizens' assemblies from most other deliberative and participatory democratic mechanisms. The OECD's 2020 report on innovations in citizen participation lists 12 different methods, organised into four categories:



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1. Informed Citizen Recommendations on Policy Questions	2. Citizen Opinion on Policy Questions	3. Informed Citizen Evaluation of Ballot Measures	4. Permanent Deliberative Bodies
Citizens' Assemblies	G1000	Citizens' initiative review	The Ostbelgien Model
Citizens' juries/panels	Citizens' council		City Observatory
Consensus conference	Citizens' dialogue		
Planning cells	Deliberative poll		
	WWViews		

Table 1: Models of Citizen Participation (OECD 2020)

As the OECD report notes, citizens' juries and panels follow the same three-stage process as citizens' assemblies.<sup>13</sup> The main difference is the length of time, and the number of citizens involved. In this paper, the term 'citizens' assembly' is used for any participatory and deliberative exercise that follows the three-stage structure above and whose membership is composed through random stratified sampling. Consensus conferences separate the learning from the deliberation and decision-making phases, whilst planning cells usually lack professional facilitation of discussions.

### 1.3. The value of deliberation and participation in a sustainable democracy

A sustainable democracy is one that remains responsive to citizens by adapting as local and global circumstances evolve. Aside from competitive elections, the rule of law, and the free exchange of information, sustainable democracies should have strong accountability structures (between different branches of government and between government and citizens), adequate and equal opportunities for citizens to participate in the democratic process, and civic education that equips citizens with the knowledge, skills and character values that promote engagement in public life. This section examines how participatory and deliberative mechanisms contribute to the sustainability of modern democracy. It takes citizens' assemblies as a specific touchstone, because they blend

<sup>13</sup> OECD, Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions: Catching the Deliberative Wave (OECD Publishing, 2020), 39, <https://doi.org/10.1787/339306da-en>.



citizen participation at various scales with robust and focused deliberation.

### 1.3.1. Improving accountability and restoring trust in democracy

A Pew Research Center survey from June 2024 has identified that satisfaction with democracy has declined in high-income countries since 2021.<sup>14</sup> In this chart, the UK shows the steepest drop, with a fall from 60% satisfaction in 2021 to just 39% satisfaction in 2024. Tim Hughes suggested in 2023 that more extensive citizen participation in democracy enables citizens to act as an additional forum for holding elected politicians to account, and incentivising politicians to act in the public interest.<sup>15</sup> By including a more diverse range of voices, more extensive participation can also centre the voices of those specially affected by decisions, deepening accountability.

Deliberation further augments this: in participatory and deliberative democracy, citizens must justify their views to each other, and in so doing can better understand the complexities of the public interest. This can enable more tailored responses to government decision-making.

Niemeyer and Jennstal add that participatory and deliberative democracy also enhances the ability and willingness to engage in political participation.<sup>16</sup> This is for two reasons. First, participants in citizens' assemblies can bring their own experiences to bear in forming policy recommendations. Second, the stratified random selection processes ('sortition') through which citizens' assemblies are composed can grant an assembly greater representative legitimacy than some parliaments, especially where electoral systems produce disproportionate results. By creating the conditions for future political participation, citizens' assemblies not only directly contribute to accountability in the present, but are self-sustaining in enabling future accountability.

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<sup>14</sup> Richard Wike and Jnaell Fetterolf, 'Satisfaction with Democracy Has Declined in Recent Years in High-Income Nations', Pew Research Center, 18 June 2024, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2024/06/18/satisfaction-with-democracy-has-declined-in-recent-years-in-high-income-nations/>.

<sup>15</sup> Tim Hughes, Putting Citizens at the Heart of the UK Constitution, Insight Paper, Review of the UK Constitution (Institute for Government & Bennett Institute for Public Policy, 2023), 10, <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/publication/put-citizens-heart-constitution>.

<sup>16</sup> Simon Niemeyer and Julia Jennstal, 'Scaling Up Deliberative Effects - Applying Lessons of Mini-Publics', in *The Oxford Handbook of Deliberative Democracy*, ed. Andre Bächtiger et al. (Oxford University Press, 2018), 329.



### 1.3.2. The educative effect of citizens' assemblies

Citizens' assemblies also have an educative effect on citizens. This does not consist only of knowledge about the political system; participation and deliberation also develop the skills base and character values by which citizens can positively shape the society around them.

Citizens' assemblies directly improve political efficacy. Their learning phases equip both assembly members and the public with objective information about the policy debate in issue. For assembly members specifically, engaging in deliberations improves critical thinking skills, the ability to listen to those with differing views, and the confidence to advocate for their own views. This enhances their skillset with respect to wider political participation in all forms. Research published by the ICfS in March 2025 highlights specific skills valuable for democratic participation and the pedagogical techniques that can be used to cultivate them.<sup>17</sup>

Second, citizens' assemblies can cultivate within assembly members a mindset of *wanting* to participate in political decision-making. In other words, citizens should be driven by a sense of social responsibility – of “moral or civic duty”, to use Crick’s term<sup>18</sup> – rather than being compelled to participate by the state. For example, following the Newham Citizens’ Assembly on ‘Greening the Borough’ (2021), 80.6% of participants who responded to the feedback survey strongly agreed with the statement ‘I would like to take part in a similar process in future’, with a further 13.9% agreeing to this. Citizens’ assemblies thus play an educational role by enacting participation and thus creating a positive feedback loop for participation that is seen in participatory governance within the education sector.<sup>19</sup>

However, there is also reason to be sceptical about the *extent* of these benefits in any given citizens' assembly. The typical recruitment process for a citizens' assembly has the following stages:

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<sup>17</sup> Pavel Cenkl and Pravar Petkar, Interlinking Sustainable Democracy and Sustainable Education: A Roadmap for Reform (International Centre for Sustainability, 2025), 14–18, <https://icfs.org.uk/interlinking-sustainable-democracy-and-sustainable-education-a-roadmap-for-reform/>.

<sup>18</sup> Bernard Crick, ‘Citizenship: The Political and the Democratic’, *British Journal of Educational Studies* 55, no. 3 (2007): 244.

<sup>19</sup> Pavel Cenkl and Pravar Petkar, Interlinking Sustainable Democracy and Sustainable Education: A Roadmap for Reform, 21–25.



- i. The random selection of a pool of citizens in the designated city or region.
- ii. Invitations are sent out to members of this pool to participate.
- iii. Of those who accept, a random stratified sample is taken to ensure the assembly is demographically representative of the wider population

As Carolan and Glennon point out in their discussion of the Ireland Citizens' Assembly on abortion, the inevitable self-selection in this process means the assembly may be composed of those who are already politically engaged, whether in general or on a specific issue.<sup>20</sup> If the assembly is composed of a self-selecting elite, its educative benefits will not be sufficiently widespread. Ensuring that citizens' assemblies are sufficiently representative is therefore important not only for their democratic legitimacy, but more intrinsically, in ensuring that they can sustain democracy in the long-term.

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<sup>20</sup> Eoin Carolan and Séána Glennon, 'The Consensus-Clarifying Role of Deliberative Mini-Publics in Constitutional Amendment: A Reply to Oran Doyle and Rachael Walsh', *International Journal of Constitutional Law* 22, no. 1 (2024): 203.



## **2. Use Cases for Citizens' Assemblies**

This section employs a case study methodology to examine where citizens' assemblies should be used, given their apparent benefits for a sustainable democracy. The set of cases includes local, regional and national citizens' assemblies from the UK and other countries. Their subject matter encompasses ordinary policy matters (such as town centre development and planning), morally controversial issues, and constitutional changes. It will analyse these case studies to determine the impact of the assembly on policymaking, the assembly's democratic legitimacy and the existence of structural or design challenges that may affect their uptake. With respect to policymaking, the congruence between the assembly's recommendations and the policy decisions taken will be assessed, alongside the extent to which the assembly's recommendations were considered in the policy process.<sup>21</sup> These two criteria indicate success in translating democratic participation into policy change.

### **2.1. Citizens' assemblies on ordinary policy matters**

The UK has held several citizens' assemblies on ordinary policy matters in the last five years, especially at local council level. The Demos Citizens' White Paper on participatory policymaking suggests that citizens' assemblies could be conducted on issues such as sentencing, policing, long-term NHS funding, housing, pensions, migration and developments in science and technology.<sup>22</sup> Two conclusions can be drawn from the case studies surveyed here. First, citizens' assemblies' recommendations receive more extensive consideration when the assembly has a more focused remit. Second, there is greater congruence with the policy decisions taken where decision-makers commission the citizens' assembly.

#### **2.1.1. The remit of citizens' assemblies**

Three local citizens' assemblies in the UK represent examples of assemblies with a specific remit receiving greater consideration from decision-makers.

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<sup>21</sup> Elisa Minsart and Vincent Jacquet, 'The Impact of Citizens' Assemblies on Policymaking: Approaches and Methods', in De Gruyter Handbook of Citizens' Assemblies, ed. Min Reuchamps et al. (De Gruyter, 2023).

<sup>22</sup> Miriam Levin et al., Citizens' White Paper (Demos, 2024), 11.



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The Brighton and Hove Climate Assembly (2020) was commissioned by the Brighton and Hove City Council to recommend how carbon emissions from transport could be reduced. The Assembly produced 10 recommendations, including a car-free city centre, creating low-traffic and pedestrianised neighbourhoods, and improving cycling networks and park-and-ride systems. These recommendations informed the council's Carbon Neutral 2030 programme, despite including broad suggestions such as that the council should actively consult the community and be 'message-positive'.

A citizens' assembly was set up in Romsey, Hampshire in 2018 to recommend improvements to the area around the local bus station and Crosfield Hall (used for key functions and private events). Assembly members identified 12 priorities for town centre renewal, including improving transport infrastructure and creating an integrated transport plan, reducing the number of vehicles in the town centre by half by 2025, and creating flexible units from which start-ups and local businesses could work. Analysis by The Constitution Unit indicates that there was both an official response from the Test Valley Borough Council and significant follow-through on the assembly's recommendations.<sup>23</sup>

The Newham Citizens' Assembly on Greening the Borough was set up by Newham London Borough Council in 2021 to provide recommendations on how to improve parks and green spaces for residents. These recommendations included creating more wild-grown areas to increase biodiversity, re-introducing park rangers, improving CCTV in green spaces, and introducing Council support for inclusive and community-led activities. The Council considered all the recommendations, concurring with most of them. It also agreed to review its Local Plan for the borough considering those recommendations.

By contrast, the French Citizens' Convention on the Climate and the Climate Assembly UK (2020) both demonstrate how assemblies with a broad remit have received lesser consideration in the policymaking process.

**The French Citizens' Convention emerged during France's Grand National Debate, initiated by President Emmanuel Macron in 2019. It was proposed by the Gilets Citoyens pressure group and France's Economic, Social and Environmental Council against the backdrop of the gilets jaunes protests against eco-tax. The assembly's remit was to define measures for France to achieve a cut in greenhouse gas**

<sup>23</sup> Lauren Brown, 'Local Citizens' Assemblies in the UK: A Second Report Card', The Constitution Unit Blog, 25 March 2022, <https://constitution-unit.com/2022/03/25/local-citizens-assemblies-in-the-uk-a-second-report-card/>.



emissions of 40% by 2030 (compared to emissions levels in 1990), whilst ensuring that this was pursued in a socially just manner. The assembly produced 149 recommendations, with President Macron committing to supporting 146 of these. The recommendations were wide-ranging, including ceasing single-occupant car usage, developing recycling and waste management, and promoting education and awareness on responsible consumption. The eventual Climate and Resilience Bill 2021 translated several of the measures into law, but in a significantly watered-down manner after changes were made by both the French Government and Parliament. The remit of the assembly was very broad: even though participants were split into thematic groups, these dealt with wide individual policy areas such as travel, housing and food.

The Climate Assembly UK was initiated by six parliamentary select committees in 2020 to address how the UK might meet its 2050 Net Zero targets. Its remit was to consider the trade-offs relating to travel, food, consumption, heating, electricity, land usage, greenhouse gas removals and the impact of Covid-19 in pursuing Net Zero. The Assembly produced 25 guiding principles. The official evaluation of the Assembly suggests that even though the commissioning select committees treated it as successful, its influence was compromised for several reasons, including its wide remit and the length of the report it produced. The division of members into separate thematic groups also compromised the Assembly's ability to successfully influence government policy on Net Zero.<sup>24</sup>

These case studies suggest that citizens' assemblies on ordinary policy matters are most effective when they produce a focused and specific set of recommendations. This can be achieved either through a focused remit for the assembly from the outset, or through a wide remit that produces very specific recommendations. An assembly on prison reform is more likely to influence policymaking if, for example, its recommendations focus specifically on types of offences that should receive short sentences considering current prison capacity, than more general issues as to whether prisons are effective means of rehabilitation. Having a focused remit means that several assemblies or other deliberative and participatory processes would be needed to cover wide, polycentric policy issues. Ensuring that an assembly with a wide remit produces sufficiently specific recommendations would need skilled facilitation and sufficient information provision. Of the two options, the former is preferable at this point in time. Having assemblies with a focused remit allows for adjacent issues beyond that remit to be addressed in other deliberative processes, which also

<sup>24</sup> Stephen Elstub et al., Evaluation of Climate Assembly UK (Newcastle University, 2021), 6.



contributes to the growing evidence base for this form of democratic engagement. By contrast, relying upon skilled facilitation within a single assembly process runs the risk of overly broad recommendations being produced without a clear means for recourse.

### 2.1.2. Who ought to initiate citizens' assemblies?

The closer the link between the commissioning body for the citizens' assembly and the decision-maker, the more likely it is that the assembly's recommendations will be congruent with the eventual policy decisions. The greatest impact is where the decision-maker itself sets up the assembly.

#### Set up outside government

The French Citizens' Convention on the Climate was proposed by a collective of concerned citizens and civil society actors, in conjunction with the French Economic, Social and Environmental Council. The Council is a consultative assembly reporting on matters referred to it, where the reports are put before the Government and Parliament. The French Convention was thus operating at a distance from those with the authority to propose and draft legislation to implement the recommendations. The French Parliament significantly watered down the convention's recommendations and blocked its proposal to enshrine environmental protection in the French Constitution.

#### Set up adjacent to government

The two citizens' assemblies set up by parliamentary select committees in the UK show greater congruency, though some barriers remain in implementing recommendations. Although the Climate Assembly UK was jointly commissioned by six parliamentary select committees, the official evaluation notes that the turnover in committee membership around the period during which the Assembly was held and the lack of a plan on how to deal with the recommendations compromised its effectiveness.<sup>25</sup>

The Citizens' Assembly on Social Care in England was the first deliberative assembly to be commissioned by a parliamentary committee (jointly, by the Health and Social Care Committee and the Local Government Committee). Its remit was to advise on funding strategies and priorities for social care. The assembly produced guiding principles and recommendations on how adult social care should be funded. The recommendations were considered by the select committees, and a majority appeared in a joint select committee report for the 2018 inquiry on adult social care. This demonstrates some congruence between the assembly and the

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<sup>25</sup> Stephen Elstub et al., Evaluation of Climate Assembly UK, 6–7.



committees, but not with the official decision-makers. This is because the official policy decisions rest with the government, which is not bound by the reports of select committees but instead has the remit to determine its own priorities.

### Set up by government

The clearest examples of congruence come from citizens' assemblies initiated by local government in the UK, or which are embedded in local governmental structures. The recommendations of the Brighton and Hove Climate Assembly, discussed above, informed the Brighton and Hove City Council's wider public conversations, consultations and engagement. For example, The Local Transport Plan 5, which was finalised in March 2022, implements the Assembly's recommendations on the accessibility of public transport and the need to reduce car usage.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, the recommendations of the citizens' assembly on improving Romsey town centre were endorsed by Test Valley Borough Council, the commissioning entity, in September 2020.<sup>27</sup>

**Outside the UK, one of the most effective examples of a citizens' assembly initiated by decision-makers is the permanent citizens' assembly and citizens' council in the German-speaking community of Ostbelgien in Belgium. This has involved multiple citizens' assemblies initiated by a citizens' council, made up of former citizens' assembly members. Each assembly submits its recommendation to the Ostbelgien Parliament, which must formally receive them, engage in public debate, and produce an official response.<sup>28</sup> This includes providing reasons where the assembly's recommendations are not adopted. 41 recommendations passed by citizens' assemblies between 2020 and 2024 have been adopted in full or in part by the Ostbelgien Parliament, including introducing a needs-based assessment for housing and providing financial support for young people seeking accommodation.<sup>29</sup> This highlights not only the importance of**

<sup>26</sup> 2030 Carbon Neutral Programme: Annual Report 2021-22 (Brighton & Hove City Council, 2022), 9, <https://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2022-10/Appendix%201%20Annual%20Report%202021-22%20FINAL%20covers.pdf>.

<sup>27</sup> 'Agenda and Minutes: Council - Wednesday 2 September 2020 5.30 Pm', Test Valley Borough Council, accessed 6 September 2024, <https://democracy.testvalley.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=136&MId=2654>.

<sup>28</sup> 'Citizens' Dialogue in East Belgium with Impact', accessed 3 September 2025, <https://www.buergerrat.de/en/news/citizens-dialogue-in-east-belgium-with-impact/>.

<sup>29</sup> 'Citizens' Dialogue in East Belgium with Impact'.



buy-in to a participatory and deliberative process from the decision-maker (here, the Ostbelgien Parliament), but the benefits of embedding participatory and deliberative democracy into existing representative systems through permanent bodies. This represents a step towards a 'deliberative systems' approach which focuses not only on introducing ad hoc citizens' assemblies but transforming the democratic system as a whole.<sup>30</sup>

However, the commissioning of a citizens' assembly by the official decision-maker is no guarantee of success. The Newham Citizens' Assembly on 15-Minute Neighbourhoods produced several recommendations which, according to Newham London Borough Council's official response, were already in place or part of the borough's Local Plan. Despite congruence on paper, the assembly had little practical impact, other than perhaps to rubberstamp decisions already taken by the council. The Camden Health and Care Citizens' Assembly (2020) was set up by the Camden Health and Wellbeing Board with strategic oversight from Camden London Borough Council. Its remit was to develop principles and expectations for the local health partnership to consider in shaping future change. This remit has made it harder to assess its impact on policy formation.

Therefore, the commissioning of a citizens' assembly by the official decision-maker may be necessary but not sufficient for its success.

## 2.2. Citizens' assemblies on morally controversial issues

In Westminster-model democracies, elected members of the legislature are typically given a 'free vote' on morally controversial issues such as abortion, same-sex marriage and assisted dying. This section examines three case studies of citizens' assemblies on such issues. They collectively demonstrate that a citizens' assembly on a morally controversial issue can positively influence policymaking where its process and recommendations receive wider public engagement.

### 2.2.1. Citizens' assembly with prior public consultation

A citizens' assembly was established in Jersey following a 2018 petition to the States Assembly (Jersey's parliament) to change the law to allow for assisted dying. This petition, signed by 1861 people, was followed by an online public survey, a survey of GPs and doctors'

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<sup>30</sup> Democracy:Differently, Graham Smith on Citizens' Assemblies.



and a public meeting in 2019, which demonstrated some support for change. The citizens' assembly was commissioned to ensure that the States Assembly would have an "in-depth understanding of the community's response to the associated medical, ethical, legal and regulatory issues" involved in any prospective change to the law.<sup>31</sup> 78% of assembly members agreed that assisted dying should be permitted in Jersey for residents aged 18 or over, with a terminal illness or who are experiencing "unbearable suffering and wished to end their life".<sup>32</sup> The assembly also noted that there should be safeguards, including a pre-approval process, a 'cooling off' period and that assisted dying should only take place with direct assistance from doctors and nurses (as opposed to those without medical qualifications). The States Assembly approved the availability of assisted dying 'in principle' in November 2021, demonstrating active consideration by decision-makers. Following further public consultation in 2022-23, detailed proposals on assisted dying were presented to the States assembly on 22 March 2024, with a decision taken on 21 May 2024 to proceed to the legal drafting stage. The approved policy is largely congruent with the Assembly's recommendations: assisted dying is to be available for those diagnosed with a terminal illness who have decision-making capacity, a "voluntary, settled and informed wish to end their own life", who are at least 18 years old and have been ordinarily resident in Jersey for over a year.<sup>33</sup> With the citizens' assembly involving 18-24 members, the initial process of public consultation, by drawing on additional and complementary participatory mechanisms, ensured that the recommendations of the assembly had broader democratic legitimacy amongst Jersey's population.

### 2.2.2. Citizens' assembly with a referendum

**A Citizens' Assembly was set up in Ireland to consider five issues, the first (and most high-profile) of which was the position of Art 40.3.3 of the Irish Constitution, which banned abortion. The Assembly's remit was to make a report and recommendations on this matter to the Irish Parliament.**

<sup>31</sup> Involve UK, Jersey Assisted Dying Citizens' Jury Recommendations - Initial Report (Strategic Policy, Performance and Population, 2021), 1, <https://www.gov.je/Government/Pages/StatesReports.aspx?ReportID=5433>.

<sup>32</sup> Involve UK, Final Report from Jersey Assisted Dying Citizens' Jury (Strategic Policy, Performance and Population, 2021), 4, <https://www.gov.je/Government/Pages/StatesReports.aspx?ReportID=5452>.

<sup>33</sup> 'Assisted Dying' (States Assembly, March 2024), <https://statesassembly.je/getmedia/9331e616-badc-4afc-a16b-8811b19a1a86/P-18-2024.pdf>.



Across five weekend sessions, featuring expert presentations, the consideration of submissions from members of the public, and deliberative roundtable discussions, the Assembly concluded that Art 40.3.3 should not be retained in full and should be replaced with provisions authorising the Irish Parliament to legislate to address the termination of pregnancy, the rights of the unborn and the rights of pregnant women. It also voted on 12 reasons for which the termination of pregnancy should be lawful. Following the Assembly, the recommendations were reviewed by the Irish Parliament's Joint Committee on the Eighth Amendment of the Constitution in 2017. The Committee recommended that Art 40.3.3 be repealed in its entirety, considering the need for certainty in law-making and Ireland international human rights obligations.<sup>34</sup> A referendum was held on 25 May 2018 on whether to replace Art 40.3.3 with a provision authorising Parliament to legislate as recommended by the Assembly, which passed by a 66% majority. A Bill to implement this was signed into law by the Irish President in September 2018 (the Thirty-sixth Amendment of the Constitution Act 2018).

This is one of the most clear-cut examples of official consideration of an assembly's recommendations, with a full report produced and reasons given for alternative conclusions. When the subsequent legislative approval and referendum are included, the wider process of change demonstrates significant congruence between the Assembly's recommendations and the final decision taken. Although academic commentary on the Citizens' Assembly has been divided on whether the deliberative process *created* a consensus around constitutional change and the 12-week period,<sup>35</sup> or *clarified* an existing shared social viewpoint,<sup>36</sup> the Assembly's recommendations provided to the Irish Parliament a point that had not until then arisen in legislative debate.

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<sup>34</sup> Joint Committee on the Eighth Amendment of the Constitution, Report of the Joint Committee on the Eighth Amendment of the Constitution (Houses of the Oireachtas, 2017), 6, [https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/committee/dail/32/joint\\_committee\\_on\\_the\\_eighth\\_amendment\\_of\\_the\\_constitution/reports/2017/2017-12-20\\_report-of-the-joint-committee-on-the-eighth-amendment-of-the-constitution\\_en.pdf](https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/committee/dail/32/joint_committee_on_the_eighth_amendment_of_the_constitution/reports/2017/2017-12-20_report-of-the-joint-committee-on-the-eighth-amendment-of-the-constitution_en.pdf).

<sup>35</sup> Oran Doyle and Rachael Walsh, 'Constitutional Amendment and Public Will Formation: Deliberative Mini-Publics as a Tool for Consensus Democracy', *International Journal of Constitutional Law* 20, no. 1 (2022): 398.

<sup>36</sup> Eoin Carolan and Seána Glennon, 'The Consensus-Clarifying Role of Deliberative Mini-Publics in Constitutional Amendment: A Reply to Oran Doyle and Rachael Walsh'.



Though a referendum was mandatory to approve the legislative proposals in this case under Arts 46-47 of the Constitution of Ireland, there are good reasons independent of this to hold referendums in such cases. According to evidence submitted to the House of Lords Constitution Committee, referendums can help to legitimise major changes by demonstrating public support for a particular proposition.<sup>37</sup> Parkinson adds that in a deliberative democratic system, referendums provide an “unmatched ability for the mass public to endorse or reject proposals or agreements reached elsewhere”, whether through representative legislative processes or through citizens’ assemblies.<sup>38</sup> In light of concerns that the participants of a citizens’ assembly may be a self-selecting group, mass public participation through a referendum can reinforce the assembly’s democratic legitimacy if the quality of deliberation around the referendum is sufficient.

### 2.2.3. Citizens’ assembly without public awareness

In October 2024, the Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill was introduced as a Private Members’ Bill into the House of Commons in the UK. This Bill would facilitate assisted dying for terminally ill adults in England and Wales with fewer than 6 months to live. As of January 2026, the Bill is at Committee Stage. This follows the Assisted Dying for Terminally Ill Adults (Scotland) Bill, which was introduced into the Scottish Parliament in March 2024, as well as legislative proposals in Jersey (discussed above) and the Isle of Man. However, there was no public consultation or government-commissioned citizens’ assembly on the matter for England and Wales.

A citizens’ assembly was held independently of government by the Nuffield Council of Bioethics. The assembly had 30 members and took place in seven sessions between April and June 2024. A majority of the assembly’s members agreed that the law in England should be changed to permit assisted dying, for adults with terminal conditions who have decision-making capacity.

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<sup>37</sup> House of Lords Constitution Committee, *Referendums in the United Kingdom*, London: Houses of Parliament, 2010, at para 15. <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200910/ldselect/ldconst/99/9902.htm>

<sup>38</sup> John Parkinson, ‘The Roles of Referendums in Deliberative Systems’, *Representation* 56, no. 4 (2020): 496, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00344893.2020.1718195>.





*Figure 2: A Citizens' Assembly*

It should be available both through physician-assisted suicide and through voluntary clinician-administered euthanasia. The assembly's recommendations were largely reflected in the Bill, save that it only allows for physician-assisted suicide.

However, there was limited public awareness of the process, with little to no media reporting until the assembly's initial public recommendations were published in its interim report. This contrasts with the relatively high levels of public engagement around the citizens' assemblies in Ireland and Jersey discussed above. The Nuffield Council submitted written evidence to the Public Bill Committee, and the citizens' assembly was referenced at Committee stage in the House of Commons, but there seemed to be no additional consideration of the assembly's recommendations in the legislative process. This suggests that the Nuffield citizens' assembly contained little of the public awareness that contributed to the legitimacy of the assemblies in Ireland and Jersey and received relatively little consideration from decision-makers. More extensive media coverage of the process may, following the example in Ireland, have positively contributed to informal public deliberation on the matter. With a 'free vote' permitted in the House of Commons on the Bill, there was greater scope than usual for constituents to influence the choices made by their MPs. The lack of wider public engagement on assisted dying through the citizens' assembly process therefore appears a missed opportunity.



## **2.3. Citizens' assemblies on constitutional change**

Interest has grown across the world in using participatory and deliberative democracy to legitimate constitutional changes. These are often termed citizens' conventions or constituent assemblies and can take a variety of forms, including processes where candidates compete for election. This section references only those assemblies which gather a small sample of citizens through sortition, given the focus within this paper on citizens' assemblies composed in this manner. The case studies examined in this section reveal a limited track record of success, though for reasons that are not always linked to the assembly's design.

### **2.3.1. Failure due to design only**

The Citizens' Assembly on Scotland's Future (2019) was established by the Scottish Government to provide guidance on how Scotland can overcome 21<sup>st</sup> century challenges, including those arising from Brexit. The Assembly produced 10 guiding principles for the country and 60 recommendations, including the importance of government transparency, leadership in innovation, proportionate taxation and job security for young people. The formal evaluation of the assembly has noted that its remit was so broad that it is difficult to discern whether its output has had any direct impact on the Scottish Government.<sup>39</sup> This reinforces the need for citizens' assemblies to have a focused remit to effectively influence policymaking.

### **2.3.2. Failure due to external political factors only**

For the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of devolution in Wales, a citizens' assembly was set up to produce recommendations on new mechanisms for popular engagement relating to Senedd committees, questioning government, approving budgets and citizens' agenda-setting. Recommendations included using more citizens' assemblies, having a specialist platform for holding government to account, and crowdsourcing policy proposals from citizens. The assembly's recommendations were rejected as available devolved funding was prioritised for supporting businesses during the pandemic, demonstrating the trade-offs involved in implementing recommendations. In comparison to the Scottish citizens' assembly discussed above, the failure of the Welsh citizens' assembly appears to result solely from external political factors, rather than the assembly's design.

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<sup>39</sup> Stephen Elstub et al., Research Report on the Citizens' Assembly of Scotland (Scottish Government Social Research, 2022), 8, <https://www.gov.scot/isbn/9781802018943>.



### 2.3.3. Failure due to both design and external factors

The 2004 citizens' assembly in British Columbia, Canada, was required to investigate and recommend changes to the provincial legislature's electoral system. It was set up and funded by the provincial Liberal government. The assembly recommended by an overwhelming majority that the simple majority First-Past-the-Post system be abolished and replaced with the Single Transferable Vote (STV) system. The subsequent referendum on the matter required STV to be supported by 60% of voters across the province and by a simple majority in 60% of British Columbia's 79 ridings (districts). The STV proposal met the latter but not the former threshold, garnering only 57.4% of the total votes. Despite commissioning the assembly, the Liberal Party did not support STV. The lack of congruence between the recommendations and decision here appears to result from the super-majority referendum requirement and lack of political party support. This highlights that the support of decision-makers for the substantive recommendations of citizens' assemblies – and not only the carrying out of the process – is important in translating those recommendations into policy.



*Figure 3: People voting*

A citizens' assembly on Brexit was commissioned by The Constitution Unit in 2017. Its remit was to examine options relating to trade and migration for the UK's future relationship with the EU. It was timed to ensure that its recommendations might influence Parliament whilst this stage of the negotiations was ongoing. The Assembly



recommended that the UK should maintain a close relationship with the EU (either a "comprehensive trade deal" or Single Market membership).<sup>40</sup> On trade, the UK should no longer be bound by the EU's common customs policy whilst maintaining frictionless trade, with customs union membership a backup option. On migration, free movement of labour should be maintained but greater use ought to be made of migration controls within the Single Market framework. Although the recommendations were put to parliamentary select committees, the eventual Trade and Cooperation Agreement crafted a much looser relationship between the UK and EU. There are two likely reasons for the lack of congruence here. First, there was no direct line of input into the government's policymaking from the citizens' assembly, since the assembly was not commissioned by government. Its influence relied on that of the select committees over government. Second, internal party politics within the governing Conservatives may have played a role in shaping the eventual outcome: with a very narrow majority under PM Theresa May, the party's European Research Group could use the prospect of backbench rebellion to push for a looser relationship. This case highlights how both structural design flaws and political circumstances can influence the success of a citizens' assembly.

Despite the failure of these two citizens' assemblies, they highlight that citizens' assemblies can have positive educative effects in relation to complex policy issues such as electoral reform and Brexit. Commentary on the former notes that the assembly made it "possible for ordinary citizens to become involved participants making reasoned choices rooted in their underlying value preferences" through the provision of information.<sup>41</sup> The system of preferential voting adopted in the latter demonstrates that participants can be provided with meaningful decision-making options on a matter with a highly complex series of trade-offs.

### 2.4. Conclusions

The case studies of citizens' assemblies discussed in this section point to several principles and recommendations for effective citizens' assembly design but also challenges which policymakers must overcome to realise their benefits.

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<sup>40</sup> Alan Renwick et al., *A Considered Public Voice on Brexit: The Report of the Citizens' Assembly on Brexit* (The Constitution Unit, 2017), [https://www.ucl.ac.uk/constitution-unit/sites/constitution\\_unit/files/The\\_Report\\_of\\_the\\_Citizens\\_Assembly\\_on\\_Brexit.pdf](https://www.ucl.ac.uk/constitution-unit/sites/constitution_unit/files/The_Report_of_the_Citizens_Assembly_on_Brexit.pdf).

<sup>41</sup> André Blais et al., 'Do Citizens' Assemblies Make Reasoned Choices?', in *Designing Deliberative Democracy: The British Columbia Citizens' Assembly*, ed. Mark E Warren and Hilary Pearse (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 128.



### 2.4.1. Principles for success

The case studies above indicate five principles that, if followed, can ensure that a citizens' assembly positively influences policymaking in a democratically legitimate manner.

## 1

### The assembly represents a stratified sample of citizens

Citizens' assemblies are selected by a stratified random selection process, with criteria typically including gender, age, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation and place of residence. Assemblies are representative to the extent that they match the distribution of these criteria amongst the wider population. Factors specific to the policy issue at hand, such as frequency of travel into the town centre (Romsey Citizens' Assembly, 2018) and how participants voted in the 2016 EU referendum (Constitution Unit Citizens' Assembly on Brexit) may also be included. This increases the democratic legitimacy of the assembly process.

## 2

### Quality of deliberations

The purpose of citizens' assemblies is to engage the public in reasoning about a policy matter. Citizens' assemblies thus require high-quality deliberation, which can be achieved through varied means. Professional facilitators are often used to ensure that participants adequately consider each other's views and the different policy options available. Citizens' assemblies may also formulate conversation guidelines to structure deliberations. This exercise was conducted by a small group of participants at the start of the Ireland citizens' assembly on abortion.

## 3

### A range of independent experts involved

The 'learning' phase of citizens' assemblies is vital in providing an objective information basis for deliberation, which reinforces the assembly's legitimacy. To ensure this, best practice suggests that a wide range of independent experts should present to assembly members. The Ireland Citizens' Assembly on abortion is again a good example.



The Expert Advisory Group and the Steering Group for the assembly looked for experts who were not “seen primarily as advocates on one side or another of the issue at hand” and sought to include both sides of the argument were represented on contested issues.<sup>42</sup>

## 4

### Appropriate size and extent in relation to the issue at hand

The size and extent of a deliberative exercise relative to the issue at hand can inform how much weight ought to be attached to it. Demos suggests that larger citizens' assemblies involving 100-200 members of the public and lasting at least 30 hours should be used for major collective challenges, politically challenging or emotive policy areas, and morally controversial questions.<sup>43</sup> Local issues, meanwhile, are better tackled by citizens' juries of 12-24 citizens which last between 2 and 4 days. This helps to calibrate the assembly's representative character and the extent of its deliberation.

Financial viability of citizens' assemblies and other deliberative processes is also key. Demos has estimated that the cost of a single citizens' assembly for 100-200 participants could range from £800,000 to £1.2m.<sup>44</sup> This is based on publicly available data about the cost of the Irish citizens' assembly on gender equality in 2020-2022 and a claim that the 2020 Climate Assembly UK cost £720,000 to run. The total spend for the Irish citizens' assembly on gender equality is set out in Table 2 below.

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<sup>42</sup> The Citizens' Assembly, First Report and Recommendations of the Citizens' Assembly: The Eighth Amendment of the Constitution (The Citizens' Assembly, 2017), para. 145.

<sup>43</sup> Miriam Levin et al., Citizens' White Paper, 40.

<sup>44</sup> Demos Citizens' White Paper, 58.



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Category	Total Spend (2019 to end June 2022)
Conference/catering and accomodation	€87,276.71
Reimbursement of travel and member-related expenses	€92,954.54
Irish translation services/provision of sign language services	€11,409.89
Broadcasting/media services/photography	€46,869.38
Recruitment of members/facilitation and notetaking services	€229,021.15
Website/advertising	€30,329.57
Legal/advisory/support services	€61,008.36
Research	€43,603.78
Technical services	€50,564.42
<b>Total</b>	<b>€653,037.80</b>

Table 2: costs of Irish citizens' assembly on gender equality (2019-2022)

The assembly consisted of a government-appointed Chairperson and 99 members selected through sortition.<sup>45</sup> It is notable that the highest expense for this citizens' assembly – on member recruitment through sortition and professional facilitation and notetaking is broadly consistent with the cost of the same services (€244,016.14)<sup>46</sup> for the 2016-2018 Irish citizens' assembly, which considered abortion (discussed in section 2.2.2) and four other issues. This assembly had the same number of members and was also selected through sortition. As many of the other costs associated with the assemblies demonstrated greater variability as between these examples, a key consideration for policymakers must be the size and extent of the assembly, as this will also guide the necessary spend on recruitment and professional facilitation.

<sup>45</sup> The assembly was interrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic. Though there was some re-selection of members required, this had also been a feature of previous citizens' assemblies in Ireland: 'Selection of Members', Citizens' Assembly, accessed 28 October 2025, <https://citizensassembly.ie/previous-assemblies/assembly-on-gender-equality/selection-of-members/>.

<sup>46</sup> '2016-2018 Citizens' Assembly', Citizens' Assembly, accessed 28 October 2025, <https://citizensassembly.ie/previous-assemblies/2016-2018-citizens-assembly/>.



# 5

## Public awareness of the assembly process

The Ireland Citizens' Assembly on abortion and the British Columbia Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform demonstrate the benefits for policymaking of public awareness of the assembly process. The educative effects of citizens' assemblies can provide an objective basis for further decision-making and contribute to a reasoned and region-wide conversation about the policy issue at hand.

### 2.4.2. Recommendations for effective design

**Recommendation 1:** citizens' assemblies should have a focused policy remit to maximise the chances of their recommendations receiving consideration by decision-makers.

**Recommendation 2:** citizens' assemblies should be directly commissioned by decision-makers to maximise the likelihood that the eventual policy decisions taken will substantively reflect the assembly's recommendations and thus make the deliberative exercise meaningful.

**Recommendation 3:** citizens' assemblies on morally controversial issues should incorporate an element of public engagement – whether through a public consultation or referendum – as well as wider media awareness to maximise their democratic legitimacy.

**Recommendation 4:** policymakers should actively consider using citizens' assemblies chosen by sortition on complex but *specific* issues of constitutional change. However, citizens' assemblies may not be effective in all cases for reasons other than their design.

### 2.4.3. Ongoing challenges.

As section 2.4.1 highlights, a significant ongoing challenge with the implementation of citizens' assemblies is their high cost. Especially where there are pressures on public finances, it is extremely difficult for governments at all levels to justify the level of expenditure currently necessary to deliver an effective and meaningful deliberative exercise. It is imperative that policymakers and democratic designers find ways to scale up citizens' assemblies at much lower cost to realise their benefits.

The second ongoing challenge is linked to the first. Citizens' assemblies are most effective when they have a focused remit. However, this also means that more citizens' assemblies would be needed to facilitate deliberation on complex and multifaceted policy issues. This reinforces the need for solutions to scale up citizens' assemblies and other forms of citizen deliberation at low cost.



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Finally, the current practice of citizens' assemblies carries an ongoing risk of the self-selection of assembly participants from those with the time, flexibility and inclination to take part. Unless participation is made mandatory – in the manner of jury duty – other avenues for democratic deliberation and participation, or adjustments to the citizens' assembly process, must be explored to maximise inclusion.



### **3. The Role of Technology In Participatory and Deliberative Democracy**

Having highlighted the use cases for citizens' assemblies in section 2 and some of the challenges in their implementation, this section examines a series of experiments from across the world where technology has been used to facilitate citizen participation and democratic deliberation. It will argue that 'DelibTech' (as it is increasingly known) can overcome some of the challenges with implementing citizens' assemblies, despite imperfections in the experiments that have taken place to date.

#### **3.1. Citizen input platforms**

Over the last 10-15 years, several novel means for citizens to engage with democratic processes have developed. At the most rudimentary level, platforms such as Change.org, which allow users to sign a public petition, have been developed. The UK Parliament's e-petition system provides that petitions which receive more than 100,000 signatures will be considered for a parliamentary debate. However, beyond signing one's name, these platforms do not allow for significant citizen input into public decision-making. Two more complex examples of citizen input will be considered here: the crowdsourcing of a new constitution for Iceland in 2011, and the digital citizens' initiative process for the Chilean constitutional convention between 2021 and 2023.

##### **3.1.1. Iceland's 2011 constitution-making process**

The 2008 financial crash triggered mass protests in Iceland (known as the 'Pots and Pans Revolution') which led to the collapse of the government and an impetus for political reform. Iceland's existing constitution had been adopted in 1944, when Danish monarchy over Iceland was ended, and largely maintained the arrangements from its 1874 constitution. This itself was substantively equivalent to the Danish constitution of 1849, affecting its legitimacy. The process of constitutional change started with two participatory National Forums, organised at a grassroots level. The first consisted of 1200 randomly selected citizens whose remit was to define Iceland's societal values. The second, which took place in 2010, was composed of 950 citizens and laid the ground for a new constitution. The next stage of the constitution-making process was to elect a Constitutional



**Assembly of 25 citizens. However, when the Supreme Court invalidated the election on technical grounds, Iceland's Parliament decided to appoint the 25 elected candidates as a Constitutional Council to draft a new constitution in three months.**

The Council was required to solicit citizen input for the constitution-making process. An official government website was set up at <https://www.stjornlagarad.is/erindi/>. The website contained a Facebook plug-in where citizens could respond to articles posted by academics, policy experts and NGO leaders on topics relating to articles within the draft constitution. There were 311 threads in total. Introductory posts were written by 204 individuals and received around 1,500 comments.<sup>47</sup> These comments were to be reviewed manually by the members of the Council. The draft constitution created by the Council included participatory proposals such as a citizens' initiative referendum, whereby 10% of voters could demand a national referendum on legislation passed by Parliament, and a citizens' legislative initiative, where the support of 2% of voters was sufficient to directly put an issue before Parliament. The constitution was approved by a referendum in October 2012 but was not adopted by Iceland's Parliament. Various reasons have been offered for this, from elected politicians' interests in maintaining the status quo,<sup>48</sup> to the invalidation of the election of the election of the Constitutional Assembly,<sup>49</sup> the inevitability of the Parliament having to make substantive decisions on a constitutional text drafted without expert input and the lack of engagement amongst political parties during the participatory process.<sup>50</sup> This indicates limits to such processes on matters of constitution-making specifically, as constitution-making may be more politically charged than ordinary policy discussions and require specific methods of change.

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<sup>47</sup> Delia Popescu and Matthew Loveland, 'Judging Deliberation: An Assessment of the Crowdsourced Icelandic Constitutional Project', *Journal of Deliberative Democracy* 18, no. 1 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.16997/jdd.974>.

<sup>48</sup> Thorvaldur Gylfason, 'Putsch: Iceland's crowd-sourced constitution killed by parliament', *Verfassungsblog*, 30 March 2013, <https://verfassungsblog.de/putsch-icelands-crowd-sourced-constitution-killed-by-parliament/>.

<sup>49</sup> Thorvaldur Gylfason, 'Democracy on Ice: A Post-Mortem of the Icelandic Constitution', *openDemocracy*, 19 June 2013, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/can-europe-make-it/democracy-on-ice-post-mortem-of-icelandic-constitution/>.

<sup>50</sup> Björg Thorarensen, 'Why the Making of a Crowd-Sourced Constitution in Iceland Failed', *Constitutional Change*, 26 February 2014, <https://www.constitutional-change.com/why-the-making-of-a-crowd-sourced-constitution-in-iceland-failed/>.



Despite this, the process nevertheless suggests that online citizen input can have some role to play in tackling the challenges associated with in-person participatory and deliberative democratic exercises. Although estimates of the cost of setting up the platform are not readily available, two experts were employed to facilitate and maintain the technical system. It is unlikely, as a result, that this would cost more than an in-person citizens' assembly in the UK, especially considering that comments were collected through Facebook rather than a dedicated platform. One major challenge in scaling this specific system was that members of the Council were required to manually review all the proposals and comments. As will be discussed in section 3.2 below, there is potential to overcome this using more modern platforms with Natural Language Processing capabilities, which would not have been available at the time. Nevertheless, Popescu and Loveland point out that the prompt provided by the initial post is likely to have had a positive role in facilitating deliberation, which distinguishes the Icelandic process from other online forums.<sup>51</sup> There are, however, doubts over whether the process was able to engage a wide range of participants. Suteu has noted that the second National Forum was self-selecting, and that the extent of citizen involvement in the online phase "seems problematic", because relatively few comments were contributed by older voters.<sup>52</sup> The Icelandic online process thus demonstrates that a rudimentary online system does have some benefits over purely in-person engagement.

### 3.1.2. Chile's digital citizens' initiative

Large protests began in 2019 in Chile to demand a new constitution owing to a lack of public trust in the existing institutional framework. This built upon a series of mobilisations and protests over the previous fifteen years.<sup>53</sup> Chile's political institutions decided to undertake a constitutional reform process "as both a survival strategy and an attempt to rebuild public trust in the political system."<sup>54</sup> This led to two constitution-making processes, concluding in September 2022 and December 2023 respectively, which both failed to generate

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<sup>51</sup> Delia Popescu and Matthew Loveland, 'Judging Deliberation: An Assessment of the Crowdsourced Icelandic Constitutional Project', 8.

<sup>52</sup> Silvia Suteu, 'Constitutional Conventions in the Digital Era: Lessons from Iceland and Ireland', *Boston College International and Comparative Law Review* 38, no. 2 (2015): 261, 270.

<sup>53</sup> Francisco Soto Barrientos et al., 'The Citizen Initiative in Chile's Constitution-Making (2021–2023): Lessons from a Participatory and Digital Mechanism in Comparative Perspective', *Global Constitutionalism*, Cambridge University Press, 2025, 1–29, Cambridge Core, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S2045381725100038>.

<sup>54</sup> Francisco Soto Barrientos et al., 'The Citizen Initiative in Chile's Constitution-Making (2021–2023): Lessons from a Participatory and Digital Mechanism in Comparative Perspective'.



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reform because the proposals made were rejected by the Chilean public in national referendums. This has been put down to a lack of cross-party political support for each draft – the first, progressive draft was rejected by conservatives, and the second, conservative one rejected by progressives<sup>55</sup> – and internal procedures within the Constitutional Convention were unsuited for reviewing constitutional texts where different provisions interact with and relate to each other.<sup>56</sup> Nevertheless, the way in which public participation within the process was facilitated through online platforms represents a useful case study for assessing how far technology can enhance participatory and deliberative democracy.

In both constitution-making processes, citizens were invited to submit to the elected Constitutional Convention proposed norms on constitutional matters. In the first process, individuals or groups wishing to submit proposals had to register with the Public Participation Registry and fill out a form containing the rationale for the proposal, a summary of its content and draft constitutional text. Registered participants could submit up to seven proposals. A Popular Participation Commission reviewed the compatibility of the proposals with Chile's international human rights commitments. Once approved, the proposals were published on the Convention's Digital Platform for Popular Participation. Only proposals with 15,000 signatures across four regions (including Chileans abroad) were voted on by the Convention. The digital platform was supported by the University of Chile's Faculty of Physical and Mathematical Sciences. Participants had to log in through a state-provided authentication and e-signature system called Clave Única. 6105 proposals were made, of which 2350 were inadmissible. 2496 were published online, and 78 met the 15,000-signature threshold.

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<sup>55</sup> Sebastian Soto, 'Two Drafts, Three Referendums, and Four Lessons for Constitution-Making from Chile', *ConstitutionNet*, 22 December 2023, <https://constitutionnet.org/news/voices/two-drafts-three-referendums-and-four-lessons-constitution-making-chile>.

<sup>56</sup> Tom Ginsburg and Isabel Álvarez, 'It's the Procedures, Stupid: The Success and Failures of Chile's Constitutional Convention', *Global Constitutionalism* 13, no. 1 (2024): 182–91, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S2045381723000242>.





Figure 4: *La Moneda, Santiago, Chile*

Over 1 million individuals were involved as signatories to the proposals.<sup>57</sup> A small minority of the 78 final proposals were not either fully or partially approved. However, Barrientos, Suárez and Alemparte suggest that the rejection of high-profile proposals, such as one on pensions reform, negatively affected the Convention's legitimacy.<sup>58</sup>

In the second constitution-making process, a joint Secretariat was established between the University of Chile and the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile, which became responsible for managing the digital platform. The Secretariat also organised civic education programmes around the available participation mechanisms. In this iteration of the process, each proposal had to be presented as an amendment to articles of the draft Constitution prepared by an Expert Commission. As previously, authors had to use the Clave Única platform to verify their identity. Proposals with at least 10,000 signatures were put forward for debate to the participatory Constitutional Council. The Secretariat allowed for different authors' proposals to be merged. 1602 proposals were submitted, with 31 receiving the requisite 10,000 signatures. Only 236,474 individuals

<sup>57</sup> Francisco Soto Barrientos et al., 'The Citizen Initiative in Chile's Constitution-Making (2021–2023): Lessons from a Participatory and Digital Mechanism in Comparative Perspective'.

<sup>58</sup> Francisco Soto Barrientos et al., 'The Citizen Initiative in Chile's Constitution-Making (2021–2023): Lessons from a Participatory and Digital Mechanism in Comparative Perspective'.

acted as signatories this time around, with 70.3% of these individuals being men; in the first iteration, the majority of signatories were women.<sup>59</sup> Although only 2 of the 31 proposals were officially approved, the ability of the authors to present and justify their proposals to the Council resulted in the substance of 22 proposals being incorporated into the draft text.<sup>60</sup>

Despite the failure of the process, the use of an online participatory platform shines light on the viability of DelibTech more generally. Official figures for the cost of the online platform were not available. Nevertheless, the verification process, which relied upon existing methods of online verification, suggests that other countries wishing to conduct a similar exercise on important national issues must invest not only in the participatory platform itself, but a means of digital identification. This will ensure that only eligible residents, voters and expatriates can participate, safeguarding the process from foreign interference. The upfront cost of such an exercise is, as a result, likely to be lower in countries such as Estonia or India where digital ID is already mainstream, than in the UK, which lacks a universal digital ID system. Both constitution-making processes also involved extensive multi-stage review processes for proposals. This creates a resource challenge, should the process be repeated in exactly the same form. However, were such a citizen input system to be used at a smaller scale (e.g. at local or regional level), the resource requirements for proposal review are also likely to be correspondingly lower, since there will be fewer possible participants. The online citizen input system used here has a mixed record in terms of including those beyond a self-selecting group. Although the first constitution-making process appeared to engage men and women in fairly equal balance, the signatories only numbered 5% of the total population. The second constitution-making process was much less representative, with signatories dominated by men with a high level of education.<sup>61</sup> Sebastián Soto, the vice-president of the Expert Commission in this stage of the process, puts this down to a wider 'constitutional fatigue'.<sup>62</sup> This suggests that whilst online citizen input platforms such as those discussed in this section have the potential to widen

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<sup>59</sup> Francisco Soto Barrientos et al., 'The Citizen Initiative in Chile's Constitution-Making (2021–2023): Lessons from a Participatory and Digital Mechanism in Comparative Perspective'.

<sup>60</sup> Francisco Soto Barrientos et al., 'The Citizen Initiative in Chile's Constitution-Making (2021–2023): Lessons from a Participatory and Digital Mechanism in Comparative Perspective'.

<sup>61</sup> Claudia Heiss, 'The New Chilean Constituent Process: Exercising the "Muscle" of Public Participation in an Adverse Context', *ConstitutionNet*, 29 August 2023, <https://constitutionnet.org/news/new-chilean-constituent-process-public-participation>.

<sup>62</sup> Sebastian Soto, 'Two Drafts, Three Referendums, and Four Lessons for Constitution-Making from Chile'.



participation as a supplement to existing in-person participatory and deliberative exercises, but also have their own design challenges.

### 3.2. AI-facilitated consensus platforms

As artificial intelligence has developed, the scope for citizen engagement in public decision-making has extended beyond the platforms highlighted above, which only allow citizens to contribute points without fostering dialogue. Newer platforms based on machine learning and Natural Language Processing offer the potential for citizen consensus to be reached on complex policy matters by analysing and combining submissions to highlight areas of agreement that might not otherwise have been apparent. This section considers three such case studies, in order of the complexity of the technology used.

#### 3.2.1. Pol.is: Uber Regulation in Taiwan

The use of the Pol.is platform to synthesise citizen input on the licensing of Uber in Taiwan, as part of the wider vTaiwan initiative for government-led online consultation, is amongst the most famous uses of DelibTech. Pol.is is an online survey platform that gathers, analysis and visualises what different groups of people think about an issue in real time in response to a specified prompt. Verified users can submit statements, but unlike mainstream social media platforms such as Facebook or X, or online forums such as Discord or Reddit, other users cannot reply to statements; they may only vote to agree with the statement, disagree with the statement or pass. Every time a comment is upvoted, the system elevates it, with an algorithm designed to promote consensus.

**The vTaiwan initiative in question here sought to examine how to regulate Uber's operations in Taiwan, given the competition that this created with traditional taxi services. The process involved 1737 participants, who generated a total of 47539 votes and 144 comments. The participants included taxi fleets, carpoolers and ordinary citizens. Facebook ads were used to draw people towards the conversation on Pol.is, and the Pol.is results were later used to frame livestreamed discussions with relevant stakeholders. When participants were shown statements and asked to vote, their avatar would move on the visual display towards a group of other participants with similar feelings. Initially, the groups were divided amongst those who felt Uber's registration should be cancelled, and those who preferred Uber over traditional taxis. As more comments were added and more votes gathered, one group coalesced around the view that unlicensed passenger vehicles should be outlawed, whilst the other was happy that Uber had found a workaround for a system that relied on taxis joining a**



**taxis fleet. Eventually, participants settled upon three suggestions (paraphrased below):<sup>63</sup>**

- 1. The government should set up a fair regulatory regime for transportation.**
- 2. Uber needs to convince the Taiwanese community adequately that it should not pay taxes in Taiwan.**
- 3. Uber vehicles should display the registration certificate, license and driver's information in the way that traditional taxis do.**

The changes between the statements at different stages of the process highlight how Pol.is helped participants to change their minds through the process and develop their thinking on the matter at hand. It thus had a positive role in facilitating consensus, generating similar outcome to some of the citizens' assemblies discussed in section 2. Since Pol.is is also open-source, it represents an effective way to scale a participatory process at relatively limited cost. The use of the Pol.is visualisations in other debates also provides an effective way of creating public awareness around a participatory process that was lacking in some of the in-person citizens' assemblies. However, this process also has two limitations. First, marketing the platform through social media risks excluding those who are not caught by the adverts, or who do not use the social media platforms on which the adverts are displayed. Second, although Pol.is is participatory, its scope for deliberation is limited, as participants cannot engage in reasoned dialogue with each other on the issues at hand.

### 3.2.2. Decidim: France and Barcelona

Decidim is an online platform launched in early 2016 by Barcelona's city council. It aimed to pursue 'technological sovereignty' by re-centring control of the city's infrastructure and data into public hands. It was built by an open community made up of public servants, members of professional associations, university researchers, students and activists. The platform facilitates large-scale processes for strategic planning, participatory budgeting, public consultation, collaborative design and more. Participants on the platform can create proposals, sign and support them, comment, receive notifications, virtually attend public meetings and even access the minutes of those meetings.

Decidim has been used over 70 times, including at municipal level in Helsinki and Pamplona, and by NGO networks and cooperatives. One such instance of its use was the French Citizens' Convention on the

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<sup>63</sup> Audrey Tang 唐鳳, 'Uber Responds to vTaiwan's Coherent Blended Volition', Pol.Is Blog, 12 February 2017, <https://blog.polis/uber-responds-to-vtaiwans-coherent-blended-volition-3e9b75102b9b>.



Climate, discussed in section 2. It was used to amplify the citizens' assembly process such that all French citizens and NGOs could post ideas. These were synthesised through the online platform by a combination of Natural Language Processing and human facilitators. The platform limited user posts to one post for each of the five themes under discussion. The organisers disabled comments and votes to foreground the substantive quality of each contribution rather than the total number of contributions made. AI was also used for toxicity screening and to flag hateful or inappropriate content, with its decisions then reviewed by human administrators.



Figure 5: Examples of AI platforms

The final set of contributions was shared with the assembly's participants as a form of public input (similar to that used in the Ireland citizens' assembly on abortion) within the assembly's deliberation.

The failure of the French Citizens' Convention on the Climate is, as discussed above, in large part down to the design of the in-person assembly. However, Decidim has been in regular use in participatory processes at municipal level in Barcelona. It can overcome some of the challenges identified with in-person citizens' assemblies, though has limitations relating to its scope for deliberation and its reliance on an existing participatory culture. Decidim is open source and non-proprietary, and can therefore engage citizens in large municipalities at a significantly lower cost than an in-person citizens' assembly. Its



low cost suggests that it can play a role in scaling up in-person participatory processes, although it has often been used in practice as a *complement* to in-person participation rather than a substitute for it.<sup>64</sup> Barcelona, where its early success has taken place, also had a pre-existing culture and practice of citizen participation on municipal planning issues. Decidim has thus been used to digitise *existing* participatory systems rather than to create new ones. Although Decidim can engage new participants, it may not necessarily promote more inclusive deliberation. Interviews with the officials promoting Decidim at municipal level suggest that it promotes citizen input rather than deliberation,<sup>65</sup> which involves dialogue between citizens and reason-giving. Although an analysis of the cascade of online comments suggests that negative responses to proposals are more likely to promote responses,<sup>66</sup> more evidence of reason-giving and the quality of discussion is needed to establish that Decidim successfully promotes deliberation, rather than simply online engagement.

### 3.2.3. ReMesh: Libyan Peacebuilding Process

ReMesh is a proprietary AI-powered platform designed to help researchers extract meaningful insights from conversations. It can solicit responses from participants to multiple-choice and open-ended questions and uses machine learning and Natural Language processing to cluster similar answers together, enabling the large-scale analysis of qualitative opinions. Participants' responses are shared with other participants to identify areas of agreement. It was started in 2012 during the Israel-Palestine conflict such that the "disparate communities [could] talk amongst themselves in a facilitated manner."<sup>67</sup>

**The most well-known use of ReMesh occurred between October 2020 and January 2021. The United Nations Support Mission in Libya, with backing from the UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs' Innovation Cell, used ReMesh to run five large-scale digital dialogues as part of**

<sup>64</sup> Rosa Borge et al., 'Democratic Disruption or Continuity? Analysis of the Decidim Platform in Catalan Municipalities', *American Behavioral Scientist* 67, no. 7 (2023): 926–39, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00027642221092798>.

<sup>65</sup> Rosa Borge et al., 'Democratic Disruption or Continuity? Analysis of the Decidim Platform in Catalan Municipalities'.

<sup>66</sup> Pablo Aragón et al., 'Deliberative Platform Design: The Case Study of the Online Discussions in Decidim Barcelona', in *Social Informatics*, ed. Giovanni Luca Ciampaglia et al. (Springer International Publishing, 2017).

<sup>67</sup> Simon Horton, *The End of Conflict* (The Invisible Imprint, 2025), 202.



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ongoing peacebuilding efforts, which were focused on the East-West divide in Libya. Using a simple, mobile-accessible web platform, ReMesh allowed up to 1,000 participants in each dialogue to engage in Libyan Arabic on the impact of the civil war and ceasefire, the role of domestic militias and foreign fighters, ongoing economic concerns including the distribution of oil revenues, human rights issues and the upcoming elections. Participants were also invited to pose questions to candidates for the Government of National Unity, which were put to the candidates on live television. The aim of the process was to encourage authentic and procedurally fair peacebuilding by enhancing inclusivity and amplifying diverse voices.

The use of AI enabled the analysis of thousands of data points to rank preferred proposals and cluster similar responses to highlight consensus amongst the participants in a fraught situation. ReMesh also allowed for the sharing of the online dialogues with local political leaders as well as on social media. The dialogues had an audience of 1.7 million people, a third of the Libyan population.<sup>68</sup> This process helped the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum to choose an interim Government of National Unity in February 2021, generating significant popular legitimacy in the process. The interim government was endorsed by the Libyan House of Representatives in March 2021.

The success of ReMesh in this situation is notable because unlike the other examples discussed in this paper, it is the only one that deals with a scenario of peacebuilding following conflict. This underscores the wide applicability of participatory and deliberative democracy, whether or not facilitated by technology. The use of ReMesh in this case suggests that it has some potential in addressing the three challenges identified in respect of in-person participatory and deliberative exercises. The scope to engage 1,000 participants at a time indicates that tools with the capabilities of ReMesh can be used to significantly scale up deliberative exercises and ensure wide public awareness thereof. A 2023 report on the use of ReMesh in collective dialogues for developing policy guidelines for AI assistants puts the cost of one process at US\$ 10,000.<sup>69</sup> This represents a significant cost saving in comparison to in-person citizens' assemblies in the UK.

<sup>68</sup> Colin Irwin et al., 'Using Artificial Intelligence in Peacemaking: The Libya Experience', paper presented at WAPOR 74th Annual Conference, 2 November 2021, <https://peacepolls.etinu.net/peacepolls/documents/009260.pdf>.

<sup>69</sup> Andrew Konya et al., Democratic Policy Development Using Collective Dialogues and AI (Remesh, 2023), [https://4256459.fs1.hubspotusercontent-na1.net/hubfs/4256459/2023%20Assets/democratic\\_policy\\_development\\_openai\\_11\\_1\\_23.pdf](https://4256459.fs1.hubspotusercontent-na1.net/hubfs/4256459/2023%20Assets/democratic_policy_development_openai_11_1_23.pdf).



However, the proprietary nature of ReMesh means that one process is likely to cost considerably more than a process conducted using a commons such as Decidim. Finally, a review of the process in Libya by those involved in conducting it highlights that although there was mass engagement, more is needed to include the voices of under-represented groups in such a process. The authors state "AI is not a panacea that can make longstanding societal issues disappear."<sup>70</sup> This suggests that DelibTech alone may not be able to overcome the challenge of self-selection for participatory and deliberative process. Instead, it will need to be accompanied by programmes of civic education that create space for under-represented groups to participate in public decision-making.

### 3.3. Taking Stock

The five case studies discussed in this section demonstrate that DelibTech can play a positive role in addressing some of the challenges that arise in relation to in-person participatory and deliberative democratic exercises such as citizens' assemblies. DelibTech can contribute to a lower-cost process by widening participation from the randomly selected group of citizens' assembly members to the population at large. Newer platforms such as Pol.is and Decidim can also enable the scaling up and increased frequency of participatory and deliberative democracy at lower cost, with ReMesh providing a proprietary solution to the same issue. Based on this, there is a strong case for further DelibTech experiments, especially at local levels. The Waves initiative by Demos and New Local, a €1 million Google-funded trial of 'digital democracy' including ReMesh and PSi, a voice-based deliberative conversational platform, is a good example of this.<sup>71</sup> It is being conducted in conjunction with Camden London Borough Council and South Staffordshire District Council in the UK.

However, the challenge of participant inclusion remains partially unresolved. Those who are frequently under-represented in electoral processes and other forms of public decision-making continue to be under-represented in online and AI-driven deliberative platforms. This suggests that the increased use of DelibTech must be accompanied by other reforms, including to civic education, to redress this issue. In policy terms, therefore, it is important to link initiatives promoting political and media literacy with those like Waves that are focused on trialling DelibTech.

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<sup>70</sup> Colin Irwin et al., 'Using Artificial Intelligence in Peacemaking: The Libya Experience'.

<sup>71</sup> Demos, 'Waves'.



## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

This paper has surveyed options for the future of participatory and deliberative democracy in the current digital age. It argues for the benefits of citizens' assemblies, which it finds should have a highly focused and specific remit, should be commissioned by decision-makers and should, when dealing with morally controversial issues such as assisted dying, incorporate wider public engagement to ensure their democratic legitimacy. Recognising the cost and resource challenges associated with in-person citizens' assemblies, however, it makes the case for the use of DelibTech to engage citizens in participatory and deliberative democracy at scale. DelibTech may be used as a standalone mechanism for engagement, or in conjunction with an existing in-person participatory and deliberative process. Although this paper has focused solely on citizens' assemblies in public decision-making, there is significant scope for these lessons to be applied in the context of large membership organisations such as students' unions with an internal democratic structure.

For participatory and deliberative democratic processes to be commissioned by decision-makers, it will be necessary to build up an evidence base in each country that highlights how such processes can be adapted to local linguistic and cultural requirements. This is best achieved through instituting or strengthening democratic deliberation at local levels with the aid of emerging technology. Accordingly, this paper recommends the following measures for public decision-makers and large membership organisations.

**1** **Introduce small-scale participatory and deliberative processes facilitated by open-source technology such as Pol.is or Decidim.**

- A. Governments and public officials should hold these at the most local level where autonomous decision-making is possible, such as in local councils.**
- B. Membership organisations such as students' union bodies or housing associations can test these at committee levels before expanding to the wider membership base.**

**2** **Choose focused and specific issues for participatory and deliberative processes to maximise the likelihood of the process producing actionable recommendations.**



### 3

Commission independent participant evaluations of each participatory and deliberative process by think-tanks or research institutes to identify points of success and lessons learnt for future exercises. This will build up the evidence base for participatory and deliberative democracy at regional and national levels.

To supplement this, governments should create the space and offer funding for civic society organisations to facilitate civic education across all age groups, both within and outside the formal educational system. This will create the conditions for future participatory and deliberative exercises in all settings.



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