
Why & When to use citizens' assemblies?

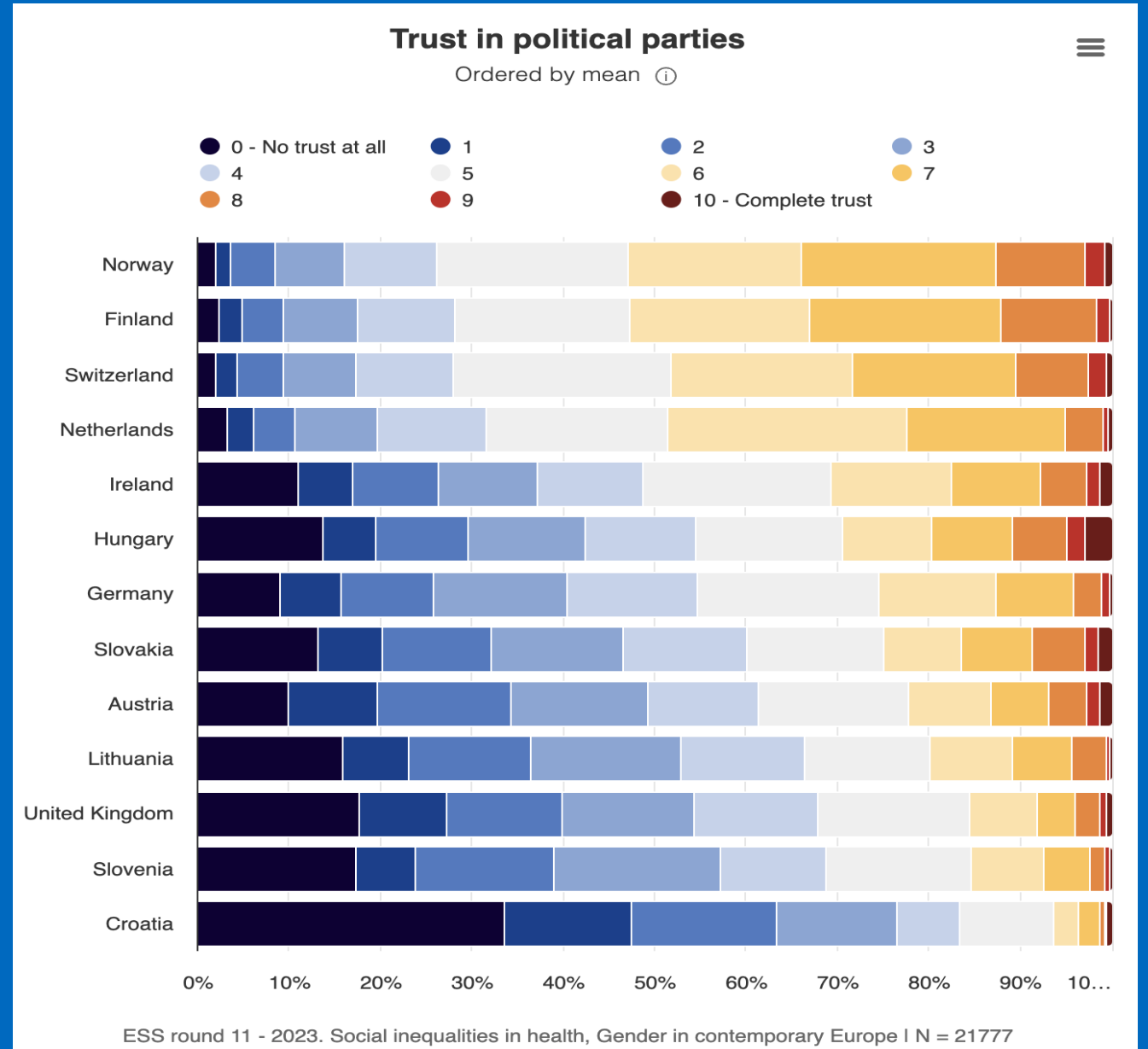


Dr. Nabila Abbas, FIDE (Europe)



Decreasing trust in political parties...

Elections are no longer sufficient

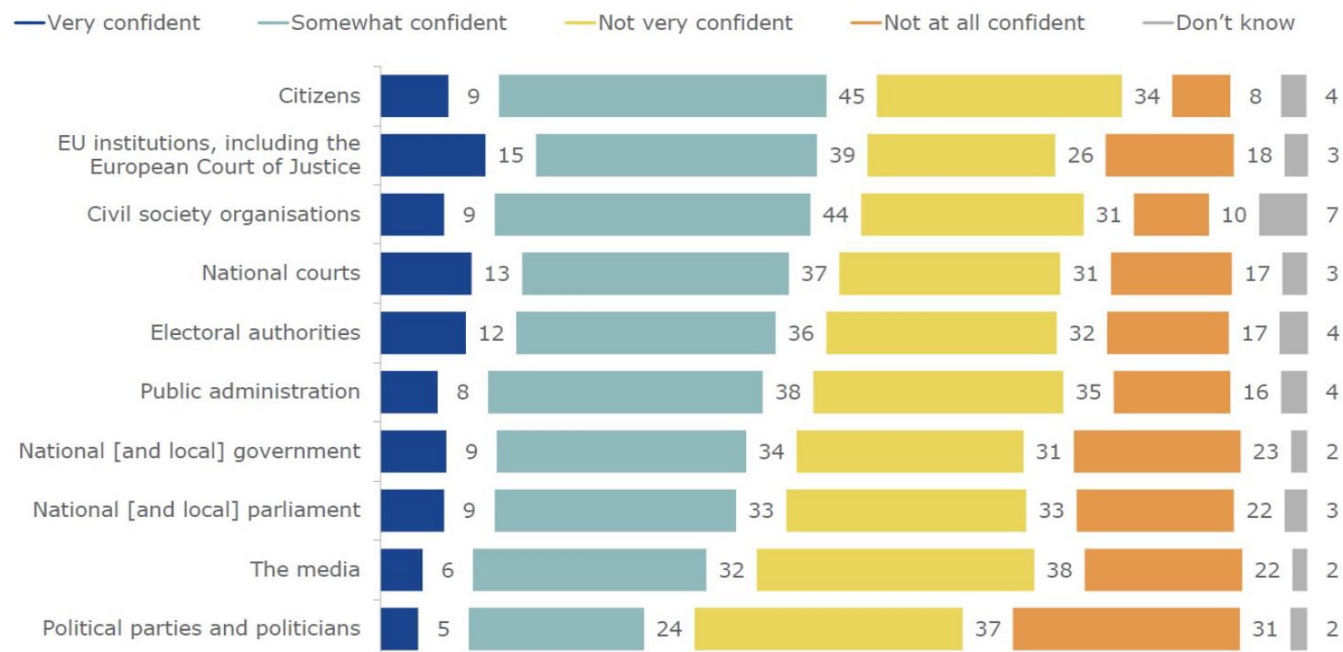


... & increased trust in citizen

Citizens have the most confidence in their fellow citizens when it comes to defending democracy!

Q4 In your view, what are the most important elements that define free and fair elections?

Respondents were also asked which institutions or actors they have most confidence in when it comes to defending democracy in their country. The largest share reply that they have confidence in citizens to defend democracy in their country (9% are 'very confident' and 45% 'somewhat confident'). In addition, more than half of respondents show confidence in EU institutions, including the European Court of Justice (15% are 'very confident' and 39% 'somewhat confident').

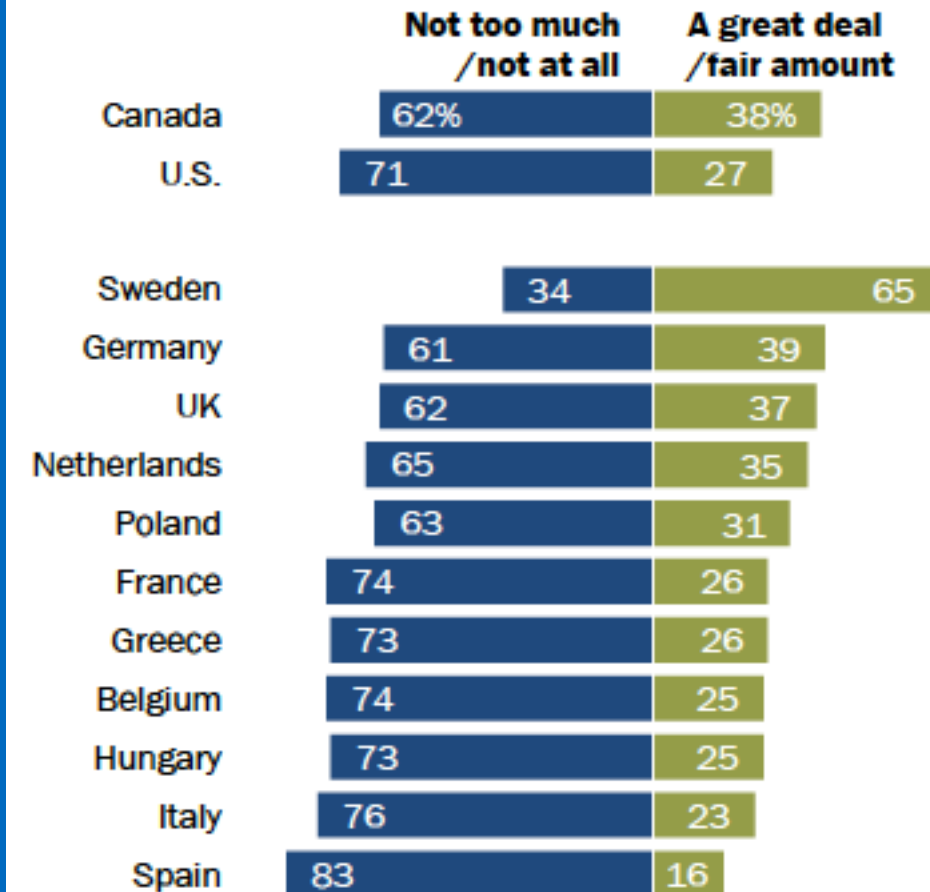


Limited citizens' influence in politics

However, most citizens don't feel that they have much influence on politics!

Few feel political systems allow citizens like them to have influence

% who say the political system in their country allows people like them to have ___ influence on politics



Source: Spring 2022 Global Attitudes Survey

What is a citizens' assembly?

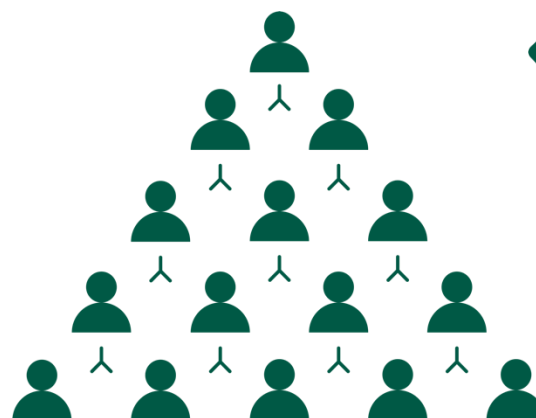
Random
Selection



Learning



Deliberation



Recommendations



Follow-up



Requirements: a clear task, sufficient time, resources & information to make recommendations on a public policy issue

Why citizens' assemblies?



Time for real debate



Beyond the Usual Suspects



Building Trust



Improved policy legitimacy & better policy outcomes



Beyond opinion polls



Lobby Control

Random Selection

Creates fair, inclusive & diverse representation of society



...instead of the usual politicians & experts shaping politics



Learning

- Citizens are provided with facts, perspectives and unavoidable trade-offs by experts & stakeholders
 - Citizen are given a broad understanding of the evidence and information related to an issue to make informed judgments.
- Promotes mutual understanding and breaks down entrenched divisions!

When to initiate a citizens' assembly?



Public Interest and Controversy

(e.g., abortion rights, healthcare reform, affordable housing)



Complex issues that require trade-offs

(e.g., artificial intelligence regulation or climate change)



Long-Term Challenges

(e.g., genetic engineering, nuclear waste management)



Deadlocked Policy Process or impartiality required

(e.g., electoral system reform, constitutional reform, politicians' salaries, corruption)



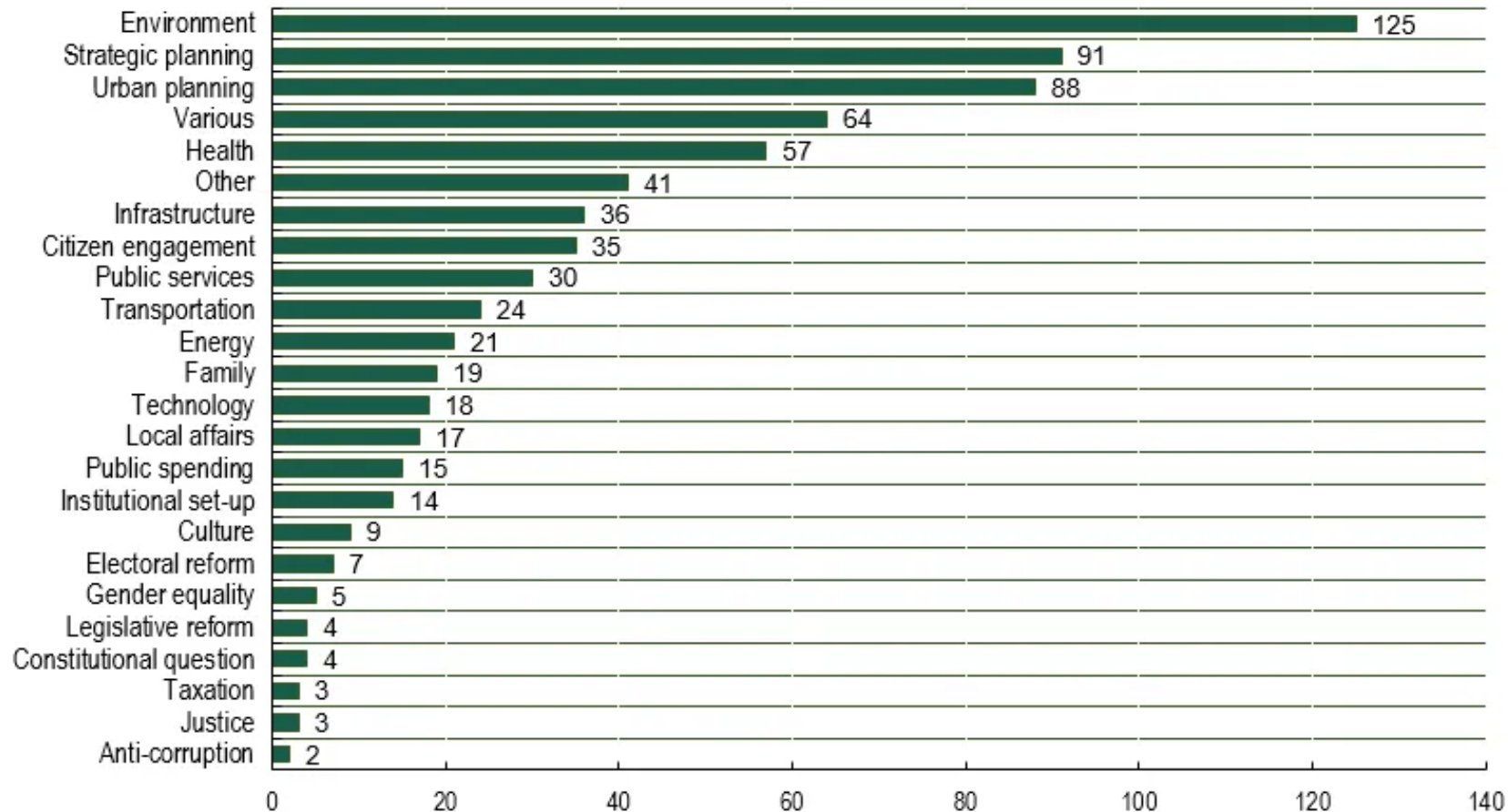
Value-driven dilemmas

(e.g., end-of-life & assisted dying)

When to use citizens' assemblies?

Figure: Deliberation is being used to solve long term issues, in particular environmental topics

Number of times a policy issue has been addressed through a representative deliberative process



Note: n=733; Various include all the permanent processes as they regularly address different policy issues. Other include agriculture; consumer protection; migration; water management; youth.

Source: OECD Deliberative Democracy Database (2023)



When to use citizens' assemblies in the policy-making cycle ?

1. Agenda-setting stage

Early in the process, when there's a need to explore the scope of an issue or identify priorities.

2. Policy-formulation stage

When there are multiple policy options that require weighing arguments

3. Policy Adoption Stage

When the government needs input before making final decisions on a major policy proposal

4. Policy Implementation Stage If a policy is facing implementation challenges or when local insights are needed

5. Evaluation After a policy has been implemented for some time, to gather public perspectives on its effectiveness

When to use citizens' assemblies in the policy-making cycle ?

Citizens' assemblies should *only* be initiated when public input can *meaningfully* improve the quality, legitimacy, or acceptability of policy decisions.

Their initiation should consider the complexity, **public interest, and potential for generating** informed **recommendations** in the policy process.

They produce the most effective results in the **agenda-setting** and **policy formulation** stages, but they can also be valuable during **implementation** and **evaluation**.

Citizens' assemblies should not be held immediately before or after elections

Key Learnings

- Citizens' produce **highly valuable recommendations** when **given enough time, resources & information**
- Citizens' assemblies create spaces in which people can deliberate with others they would not otherwise have met and **experience political effectiveness**
- Thanks to sortition, **diverse viewpoints** are brought together & **consensus-based decisions** are found



It's Your Turn!

First Task: Think about a topic that could be discussed in a citizens' assembly in your context.

Second Task: At what point in the policy cycle would you convene the citizens' assembly?



Framing the question

When is an issue **appropriate** for public deliberation?

- **There is broad concern** about it within the community
- **Choices must be made**, but there are no clear “right” answers
- **Collaboration is essential**, meaning multiple people or groups must take action for the community to make progress
- **Additional perspectives and fresh ideas** may help the community to move forward
- **Citizens have not yet had the chance** to explore different options and understand their long-term consequences
- **Decision-makers and leaders** need input from public judgment in addition to expert opinions



Source: New Democracy Foundation,
https://newdemocracy.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/docs_researchnotes_2018_July_RampD_Note_-_Framing_the_Remit.pdf

Framing the question

An issue is **not appropriate** for public deliberation if it:

- **Is purely technical** and requires only a technical solution
- **Requires a simple "yes" or "no" decision** without room for discussion
- **Already has a predetermined solution**, with public input serving only as a formality or “rubber stamp”
- **Demands an urgent response**, leaving no time for thorough deliberation
- **Affects only a narrow interest group**, rather than the broader community
- **Involves a predetermined agenda**, where your group is advocating for a specific approach



Citizens' Assemblies work best when they are tasked with dealing with issues that have **distinct challenges, trade-offs and where politicians have been unable to act.**



How Broad or Narrow Should the Question Be?

Broad Question – Advantages:

- Allows **exploration of systematic and cross-cutting issues**.
- Facilitates **examination of complexities and interdependencies** between different issues
- Encourages **participant involvement in setting the agenda**, fostering a sense of ownership.
- Helps participants **develop a general literacy on the topic**
- Captures the energy of participants to address a variety of issues and **establish a long-term direction for action**



How Broad or Narrow Should the Question Be?

Broad Question – Issues:

- Requires more time and resources
- Not all recommendations may align with policy timelines to ensure impact
- May lead to recommendations outside the commissioner's mandate to address



Example

Austria's national climate citizens' assembly:

What do we have to do today to live in a climate-healthy future tomorrow?



How Broad or Narrow Should the Question Be?

Narrow Question – Advantages:

- Easier to design, with attention to policy dilemmas and opportunities to align with policy windows
- Generates a focused set of recommendations that policymakers can prepare to act on
- Identifies clear trade-offs and actionable options.
- Establishes clearer accountability for implementing recommendations.

Narrow Question: Focus on **specific policy challenges** such as energy costs/poverty, air pollution, congestion, or funding of health care



How Broad or Narrow Should the Question Be?

Narrow Question – Issues:

- Assembly members may feel constrained
- Limits exploration of interdependencies and systemic challenges
- The commissioner's agenda may overshadow citizens' interests, potentially leaving calls for action unfulfilled



Example

Poland national climate citizens' assembly:

How to counteract the problem of energy poverty in Poland?



Example of good questions

Yarra Valley Water needs to find a balance between price & service which is fair to everyone. How should we do this?

How should we best spend 2 Million Euros to improve our community through the use of infrastructure spending?



Source: newDemocracy
Foundation, R&D guide
Framing the Remit
Source: How to run a citizens'
assembly, liDP UK

How to get to the question

- Ensure it's an **open question**
- Make it **relevant** to people's lives
- Keep it **brief, clear** and use **easy language**
- Highlight the **challenge or trade-off** in either the question or a supporting statement
- Find a **balance between a broad & a narrow question**
- **Don't sell a solution** or lead people toward a predetermined answer
- **Test your remit** with someone outside the organising group ('Barista test')



Source: <https://knoca.eu/setting-the-remit/>
<https://www.newdemocracy.com.au/2018/07/18/framing-the-remit/>

It's Your Turn

Third Task: Frame the question citizens will engage with!

- Formulate a question that expresses the shared concern within a community.
- What is the problem? What are the points of disagreement between experts, stakeholders & public officials?
- Which stakeholders would you include to define the problem further?
- Is the question clear and understandable to participants?
- Does it allow for meaningful deliberation and exploration of trade-offs?
- Is it relevant and tied to decision-making needs?
- Rephrase the initial question and try to include all the aspects mentioned above.



Recruitment

Democratic Lottery or Sortition

- Randomly select a group of people that is broadly representative of the population



Key Principles of Recruitment

- Always involve normative elements
- Pros & cons, but there is no single “objective” truth
- Citizen Participation often less clear rules, with decisions influenced by those who actively participate.



What do people consider a **legitimate** decision-making process?

Key questions:

- Who should be involved?
- How are decisions made?

Key Principles of Citizen Participation

1. **Open:** Accessible to all.
2. **Fair:** Equal opportunity for all.
3. **Transparent:** Clear participant selection and visibility.
4. **Rule-Based:** Guided by defined rules.
5. **Representative:** Reflects the broader population.



How does sortition work?

First ask:

Who can take part in the assembly?

- Citizens – inhabitants
- Voting age or younger (16+)?
- Members from outside the community (e.g. commuters)

How big does the group need to be?

- Representativeness
- Symbolic nature
- Budget & time

What groups should be represented?

- Demographic criteria: Age, gender, origin, language, socio-economic status & place of residence
- Attitudinal criteria: pro/con/indifferent regarding the issue at hand (abortion/climate)
- Other: religious, ethnic or historical groups or minorities

The two-stage lottery

1ST STEP

Draw a few thousand names from your register and send them a letter of invitation (“like a wedding invitation”).



Cynulliad Cenedlaethol **Cymru**
National Assembly for **Wales**



20

Elin Jones AM, Llywydd/Presiding Officer
of the
National Assembly for Wales

invites you to register your interest in a

Citizens' Assembly
How can people in Wales shape their future?

to be held in mid Wales
on Friday 19, Saturday 20 and Sunday 21 July 2019

Deadline for registering your interest in this event
is **Monday 17 June 2019**

Register at www.sortitionfoundation.org/rsvp
or by phone on Freephone 0800 009 6486 (9am-6pm, Monday-Saturday)

**TAKE PART
AND
RECEIVE £200**

I don't have a register of inhabitants...

- Address list
- Phone
- Door-to-door





How to make sure people accept the invitation?

- It must seem to matter...
- A compensation is needed
- Measures to promote inclusion, such as child-care
- Other such as translation, “buddy system”,...
- “Let us know how we can make sure you can attend!”

Use door-to-door outreach for certain groups instead of relying solely on random selection.

Use population data to send more invitations to areas with lower expected response rates. (e.g.: lower socio-economic status or rural areas)

An assembly targeting 40 members might require a pool of 400 potential participants
 If the response rate is estimated at 5%, approximately 8,000 invitations would need to be distributed.

			
CASE-STUDY	TOTAL POPULATION	ASSEMBLY SIZE	NUMBER OF INVITATIONS SENT
<u>Citizen Assembly of Scotland</u>	5.45 M	120	20.000
<u>Citizen Assembly in Poznan</u>	540.365	80	19.962
<u>Citizen assembly in Ireland on biodiversity loss</u>	4.995 M	100	20.000
<u>Ostbelgien permanent Citizen Assembly</u>	80.000	Citizens' council: 24 Citizens' assembly: 25-50	1.000

The two-stage lottery

2nd STEP

Select and onboard participants

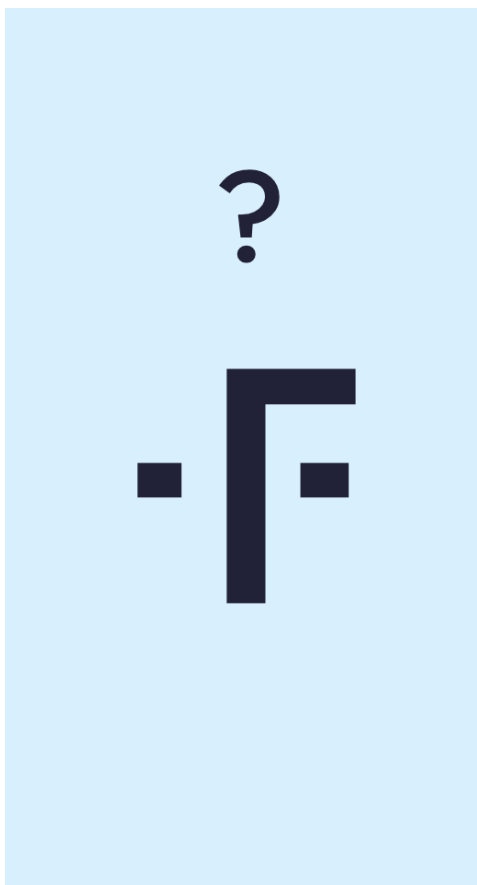
- **Receive replies to invitation letters (response rates typically 2%–20%).**
- **Use a dataset with participants' criteria for a software-driven random selection.**
- **Conduct brief “get-to-know-you” meetings**
- **Provide preparation support as needed.**

Ground rule

At any step you need to make sure it is transparent for an outsider and seen to be a legitimate procedure.



It's Your Turn



- What are the groups in your community that should be reflected in the Citizen Assembly?
- Which parts of the population will be particularly affected by your citizens' assembly?
- Will you take specific measures to mobilise specific, marginalised population groups? If so, which ones?
- Do you need criteria related to the topic of your assembly? If so, how would you do this?
- Which stakeholders are important to include?



13:00–14:15

4-8/12/2024



School on PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY

Saturday, 7th December
2024 – 14:15–15:00



Group Reflection on Citizens' Assemblies

- Q&A, Wrap-Up, and Evaluation

Facilitator: Nabila Abbas

Case Study: French Citizens' Assembly on End-of-Life (2022)

- **Date and Duration:** December 2022 – April 2023
- **Level of governance:** national
- **Number of participants:** 184 citizens
- **Number of sessions:** 9 sessions of 3 days each (27 days)
- **Commissioning Authority:** Prime Minister of France
- **Organizing Body:** Economic, social and environmental Council (CESE)
- **Type of Process:** Deliberative citizens' assembly, including online consultation



Addressed the question:

- *“Is the framework for providing support at the end of life adapted to the different situations encountered, or should changes be introduced?”*

Activities Included:

- Introductory speeches: Prime Minister & President of the National Assembly
- Debates, hearings, and group discussions
- Consulted 60+ experts (legal, medical, philosophical, religious)
- Independent research and site visits to healthcare facilities
- Engagement with healthcare professionals and patients
- Informal visits by the ministers responsible for the subject during certain sessions

Challenges Identified by citizens:

- Staff shortages in healthcare
- Unequal access to palliative care
- Overcrowded emergency services

Proposals to Improve End-of-Life Care:

- Expanded home support for patients
- Universal access to palliative care
- Enhanced training for healthcare professionals

On Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide:

- Majority supported introduction
- 23% opposed, citing risks to vulnerable groups and low awareness of current laws

Proposals: 65 recommendations to strengthen legal frameworks

Presentation of Findings:

- April 2023: Participants met President Emmanuel Macron and policymakers
- Significant public and media attention (10 400 Total press coverage)

Technology Use:

- Before the assembly: platform with testimonies
- After the assembly AI tool "Panorama" tracked deliberations and created summaries

Follow-Up:

- Parliamentary committee heard citizens
- April 2024: Draft bill hearings in the National Assembly's Special Committee
- Interrupted by Parliament's dissolution, discussions expected to resume in 2025