

Spotlighting the Backstage Governance of Citizens' Assemblies

Lessons from East Asia, Europe, and Latin America

Global Citizens' Assembly Network
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Rikki Dean

Democratic Innovations Research
Unit, Goethe University Frankfurt
(Germany)

Alan Marx

Democratic Innovations Research
Unit, Goethe University Frankfurt
(Germany)

Indira Latorre

Universidad del Rosario (Colombia)

Santiago Niño

iDeemos (Colombia)

Felipe Rey

Pontificia Universidad Javeriana
(Colombia)

Su Yun Woo

Public Administration Section,
University of Twente (the
Netherlands)

Ming Zhuang

Social Equity & Participation
Center, China



Preface

Citizens' assemblies operate like a theatre.¹ On the front stage, we see a diverse group of actors – people who look just like the rest of us – cast for the role of Assembly Members. We see them hashing out different views, clustering ideas using sticky notes, asking questions to experts, and proudly delivering a set of recommendations for the consideration of decision-makers and the wider public. This is the stage that is visible in news reports and documentaries, Instagram stories, and academic studies.

Less visible, however, is the backstage or the governance of citizens' assemblies. This is the stage where the script or forum design is written, the production budget is determined, and the rules for casting Assembly Members, facilitators, and experts are negotiated. The decisions made in the backstage have direct impacts on the performance taking place at the front stage of the assembly. These decisions determine who gets a voice, what kind of support cast members will receive, and what contingency plans are in place when challenges arise.

The first phase of the Global Citizens' Assembly Network's (GloCAN) research focuses on these issues. In this Technical Paper, an international team of researchers examined the backstage or governance of citizens' assemblies in East Asia, Europe, and Latin America. The aim of this paper is to learn lessons from the governance of citizens' assemblies around the world and, in so doing, generate actionable recommendations for the governance of citizens' assemblies on a global scale.

This Technical Paper begins by highlighting the key findings of the research, followed by a set of recommendations for the governance of global citizens' assemblies. The authors provide a summary of observations on the governance structure of citizen's assemblies in each region and emphasise how these insights can inform the governance of global citizens' assemblies. For the sake of brevity, we did not include specific descriptions of each case study, but a summary of each case study is accessible on demand.

We congratulate the authors for this meaningful intercontinental collaboration.

Nardine Alnemr and Nicole Curato
Co-Leads
Global Citizens' Assembly Network

¹ See: Escobar, O. (2015). Scripting deliberative policy-making: Dramaturgic policy analysis and engagement know-how. *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis: Research and Practice*, 17(3), 269-285.

Key Findings

There is no standard, codified practice for the governance of citizens' assemblies (CAs). This is the main finding of our analysis of fourteen citizens' assemblies in East Asia, Europe, and Latin America. There is a variety of governing structures and operating principles. There was extensive divergence in the process of:

- Agenda-setting or selecting the topic of deliberation.
- Selecting experts that will inform citizen deliberations.
- Determining the extent and type of involvement of Assembly Members in governance.
- Identifying the impact or influence of the citizens' assembly in policymaking and the wider society.
- Developing and implementing a code of ethics governing the process.

These aspects of governance were likely to be politicised, especially when lacking clarity about design decisions. Such also fuels external criticisms of the process.

We observed that many decisions about the process are made in the commissioning phase. This draws attention to the fact that the governance of a CA starts substantially before the point at which many consider a CA to “begin.”

We found that governance proceeded through informal coordination rather than transparent, formalised governance structures. This informality often functioned effectively for the small teams that governed these cases, offering efficiency and flexibility. However, informality may not work well for a global citizens' assembly with a greater number of teams and more diverse stakeholders.

Our analysis of assemblies across different political and resource conditions draws attention to the importance of contextual considerations that should be factored into the governance of a global assembly. These considerations include:

- Disparity in budget allocation and capacity for delivery between different regions.
- Different expectations about levels of control from political authorities.
- Different expectations about what constitutes a good process.

We found that when diverse stakeholders, with different expectations of the process, are involved in governance, then creating spaces for mutual learning amongst these stakeholders can be a useful way of anticipating and bridging any potential divides.

Recommendations

Our findings from the governance review of citizens' assemblies in East Asia, Europe and Latin America suggest ten recommendations for global assemblies:

1. Create transparent governance structures.
2. Open the commissioning process to a range of stakeholders.
3. Make space for mutual learning between decision-makers.
4. Govern with sensitivity to the local context.
5. Use global citizens' assemblies for deliberative capacity-building.
6. Transparently communicate the rationale for process design decisions.
7. Agree on a clear plan for participant involvement.
8. Develop an impartial system for expert selection.
9. Plan for impact.
10. Develop and apply an ethical code of conduct for governing assemblies.

These recommendations are elaborated in more detail in the final section of this report.

For comments and invitations for further conversation, please contact any of the below authors. For regionally specific information, please contact:

East Asia

Su Yun Woo at s.y.woo@utwente.nl

Ming Zhuang at ming.zhuang@participation.cn

Europe

Rikki Dean, dean@soz.uni-frankfurt.de

Latin America

Felipe Rey, reyf@javeriana.edu.co

Background and Approach

This research employed a comparative case study approach to draw out lessons from the governance of citizens’ assemblies in East Asia, Europe, and Latin America. Our goal was to develop recommendations for the governance of global citizens’ assemblies by highlighting both best practice and points of improvement from varied contexts.

Three teams conducted the research, focused on a region to examine practice in both the Global North and the Global South: Woo and Zhuang (East Asia), Dean and Marx (Europe), and Latorre, Niño and Rey (Latin America). The findings and our ten recommendations are based on a review of the governance practices within 14 cases of deliberative initiatives: four in East Asia, four in Europe and six in Latin America (see Table 1). For each case, we reviewed publicly available documents and conducted interviews with researchers who had studied the process and/or those who governed the process. These interviews were used to fill in missing information from the document analysis, check our interpretation of these “public transcripts”, and access the “hidden transcripts” of citizens’ assemblies. Public transcripts provide only the official discourse concerning the process, but not all perspectives are always apparent in publicly available information, and we wanted to be sensitive to other potential narratives found in hidden transcripts that may challenge the official discourse. After the case studies were completed, each team generated a set of cross-cutting key findings for their region (detailed above).

Table 1. List of case studies in East Asia, Europe, and Latin America

Location	Format	Topic	Scale	Time
East Asia Chengdu, China	Participatory Budgeting	Community Public Services and Infrastructural Funds	Metropolitan, 20-50 participants in each community, in 3400 communities	2018 - present
East Asia Hong Kong, SAR	Consensus Conference	MTR Fare Adjustment Mechanism	Municipal, 50 participants	2021

Southeast Asia Bangsamoro, The Philippines	Citizens' Assembly	Impact of Covid-19 on economic livelihood and economic recovery	Autonomous Region, 150 participants	2021
Southeast Asia Singapore	Citizens' Work Group	Singapore Citizenship Journey	National, 93 participants (Phase 1), 69 participants (Phase 2)	2020
Europe France	Citizens' Assembly La Convention Citoyenne pour le Climat	How to reduce France's greenhouse gas emissions by at least 40% by 2030	Nation-wide 150 Participants	2019-2021
Europe UK	Citizens' Assembly Climate Assembly UK	How the United Kingdom can reduce its greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2050	Nation-wide 110 Participants	2020
Europe Luxembourg	Citizens' Assembly Klima Biergerrot,	Developing recommendations for the National Energy and Climate Plan (NECP)	Nation-wide 100 Participants	2022
Europe Germany	Citizens' Assembly Klima Bürgerrat,	How Germany can realise the goals of the Paris Agreement	Nation-wide 160 Participants	2021
Latin America Mexico	Citizens' Jury The Citizens' Jury in Chihuahua	Anticorruption policy in the state of Chihuahua	Sub national (state of Chihuahua), 20 Participants	2020
Latin America Brazil	Multiple Citizens' Assemblies Decidadania: Citizens' assemblies in Brazil	In Salvador: the Municipal Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation Plan In Francisco Morato: basic sanitation In Toritama: air pollution	Local In Salvador: 40 In Francisco Morato: 40 In Toritama: 40	2022
Latin America Regional	Multiple Citizens' Assemblies	The assemblies will develop local climate action	Regional: Mexico, Colombia,	2024

	(Re) surgentes: Climate Citizens Assemblies in Latin America	plans for each city, as well as an intercity pact outlining principles for democratizing climate governance	Brazil, Argentina	
Latin America Colombia	Multiple Citizens' Assemblies Itinerant Citizens' Assembly in Bogota	Urban planning	Local In 2020: 110 Participants In 2021: 60 Participants In 2022: 70 Participants	2020, 2021 and 2023
Latin America Chile	Deliberative Poll Lxs 400	Constitutional reform	National 400 Participants	2020
Latin America Colombia	Citizens' Assembly Youth Citizens' Assembly	Youth policy	National 215 Participants	2023

Our data collection was guided by a focus on the following aspects of governing citizens' assemblies:

- Actors
 - The commissioner
 - Funding
 - Governance structure
- Processes
 - Agenda setting
 - Participant selection
 - Information provision and expert selection
 - Event design
 - Post-event follow-up
- Governing principles
 - Equality and diversity
 - Independence
 - Transparency

Key Findings – East Asia

We examined four case studies of citizen deliberation processes in East Asia:

- Boost Bangsamoro – a citizens’ assembly in a post-conflict community in Southern Philippines on livelihood programmes in the aftermath of COVID-19. The Assembly was commissioned by the Bangsamoro Autonomous Government and supported by the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue.
- Citizens’ Workgroup for Singapore Citizenship Journey – a deliberative process to bring citizens together to explore, discuss and create content to update an electronic program for new citizens. The Workgroup was commissioned by the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth (MCCY).
- Community Safeguard Funds Deliberation – a participatory budgeting (PB) process in Chengdu, China, for the residents of urban communities to offer proposals for community development and deliberate on them. The PB was commissioned by the Chengdu Urban and rural community development governance committee and supported by the Social Equity and Participation Centre.
- The Study of Youth Deliberative Democracy Forum on the MTR Fare Adjustment Mechanism – a consensus conference to bring together youths in Hong Kong to deliberate on the metro fare adjustment mechanism. The Conference was commissioned by a member of parliament, Cheung Yan-Yu and supported by MWYO.

Here are our key findings.

Context Matters

The four East Asian cases differ in terms of socio-political and economic factors which influence the governance of the citizen deliberation. The political context has provided both opportunities and challenges. The contextual background affects all other areas of the governance of backstage politics as it influences the motivations and constraints faced by the stakeholders, the integrity of the

processes, how they can be implemented, and how the principles of deliberation can be fulfilled.

In the post-conflict context of Southern Philippines, the country's first-ever citizens' assembly not only enabled a more inclusive and equal deliberation regarding the post-pandemic economic recovery but also built a bridge of better understanding and trust between the residents and an unelected transitional government. In Singapore, a new generation of leaders adopts approaches like Citizen Workgroups to demonstrate its commitment to collaborative governance. This, together with the government dedicating sufficient resources, ensured a well-governed set of deliberative practices in terms of ensuring inclusion and diversity. Challenges are apparent in China, an authoritarian political system that recently further tightened its control over public spaces, such as increased party control over channels of public communication and expression. In this context, some of the governance criteria (e.g., recruitment via random selection) were difficult to implement, although some social organisations, like Participation Center, still try hard to push for the participatory processes to adhere to general principles such as equality and inclusiveness. Hong Kong demonstrates both challenges and opportunities as the tension is to manage the disenchantment and political activism potential of the youth, as witnessed in the Umbrella Movement of 2014. The consensus conference (CC) sought to engage the youth through civil society to give them a voice, but the authorities decided what topic could be discussed.

Informality vs formality

The design of citizen participation in East Asian cases is formalised. The design is often derived from the standard designs of citizen deliberation such as citizens' assembly in the case of the Philippines and consensus conference in the case of Hong Kong. Governance, meanwhile, involves a mix of informality and formality. The lack of formalised codes of conduct and framework for ethics is apparent in all four cases. In our interviews, we found that organisers have considered various mechanisms for ensuring the integrity and fairness of the processes of citizen deliberation. It is largely dependent on the responsibility of the organisers to self-monitor, except for the Participatory Budgeting Process in China, which incorporated financial oversight committees. The lack of formalised structures allowed flexibility in adapting the process design and implementation to the local conditions. Innovative and flexible adaptation can be seen in all the four Asian cases:

- China: the experiment to bring participatory budgeting to social media to expand coverage and improve accessibility for marginalised groups.

- Hong Kong: adapting the rules of deliberation (e.g. to prevent participants from monopolising the discussion, the organisers enforced a rule to raise a hand if someone wants to speak).
- The Philippines: dealing with emotional participants with facilitators speaking with them one-to-one away from the deliberation.
- Singapore: participants spontaneously engage in proactive fact-gathering and fieldwork (e.g. interviews) outside the formal deliberation.

The balance between top-down and bottom-up involvement

While the endorsement and support of public officials are present in all cases, there are different permutations of the role and power exercised by governmental and non-governmental actors. Funding, for instance, is not always coming from the government except for Singapore and China. The involvement of party actors, such as civil society groups and think tanks, can be essential for training the organisers (e.g., the Philippines and Singapore), although it varies across different cases. Interestingly, almost all cases mentioned that it was the conviction of some bureaucrats and politicians who pushed for deliberation, especially in the Philippines and Hong Kong. For countries where participatory spaces are managed top-down, this is noteworthy, and it does raise the question of the implications (how sustainable can it be if it is personality-driven and cannot be institutionalised). The idea of having public officers convene and facilitate discussions is interesting in the Singapore case, as their commitment to participation and hands-on approach to being involved has resulted in what they called an ‘agile’ co-creation of the deliberative design and process.

The backstage governance is shaped by this dynamic balancing between having the authorities in firm control and societal actors negotiating for participatory spaces. Even in authoritarian settings like China, we observed non-governmental actors and local governments among the main drivers of deliberative participation. The top-down and bottom-up dynamics also resulted in the type of flexibility and informality that will have implications for governance. How can we ensure that the outcome of this balance between the top-down and bottom-up involvement of actors is favourable to the governance of the CA? What are the trade-offs and pragmatic considerations that practitioners will have to be mindful of as they interact with the various stakeholders, especially those with more power?

Ultimately, we found that for most of the cases we studied (China, Hong Kong, Singapore), the entire backstage process of designing deliberation has been pre-determined by the organisers in discussion with the commissioners. In

Singapore, for example, inviting citizen representatives from a range of organisations was a design decision by the organiser and commissioner (MCCY), who wanted to include a diversity of voices. Meanwhile, in the Philippines, there were consultations between the organisers and commissioners, but the decisions were left to the organisers since they have been working closely with the community. These are critical design decisions because they shape the conduct and outcome of subsequent citizen deliberation. These decisions often take place behind the scenes and are not always subject to public scrutiny.

Embedding a Global Citizens' Assembly in the Asian context?

One challenge in designing and implementing a global citizens' assembly is crafting ways in which the global process can be embedded in the local context. Each context has its level of deliberative capacity as well as resources to embed the global to the local. While affluent and strong states like Singapore have sufficient resources, other developing countries in the region might need external support for this to happen. The attitudes of the commissioners, usually state actors, can determine the acceptability of the global citizens' assembly. Importantly, the political context matters, too, but it is highly dependent on the issue of the global citizens' assembly. Issues that are not highly sensitive (e.g. human rights) might still be embedded within more authoritarian places like China, although with the expectations that the processes might be highly managed by the local authorities and with the potential for local adjustments and modifications of the global framework. There was also a pattern in the Asian cases to focus on local everyday issues, which is a major consideration for activating citizen participation to be interested in more global concerns.

Key Findings – Europe

We examined four case studies of national-level, citizen deliberation processes in Europe:

- La Convention Citoyenne pour le Climat (CCC) – a citizens’ assembly in France mandated to develop recommendations on measures to reduce France’s greenhouse gas emissions by at least 40% by 2030. The Assembly was announced by President Macron and commissioned by the French Government. The governing committee was led by the Economic, Social and Environmental Council (ESEC) and consisted of experts in climate change, participatory democracy, the economic and social sector, and two individuals appointed by the Minister of Ecological and Inclusive Transition.
- The Climate Assembly UK (CAUK) – a citizens’ assembly on how the United Kingdom can reduce its greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2050. CAUK was commissioned by six select committees of the House of Commons and, therefore, aimed at informing them for future inquiries and scrutiny activities. The delivery team consisted of the participation NGO Involve UK and experts on climate change.
- Klima-Bürgerrot Luxemburg (KBR) – a citizens’ assembly aimed at developing recommendations for the National Energy and Climate Plan (NECP). The Ministry of State commissioned the KBR. The main organisation responsible for the delivery of the process was the consulting firm Pétillances.
- Bürgerrat Klima – a citizens’ assembly in Germany to develop policy recommendations for how Germany can realise the goals of the Paris Climate Agreement. The Bürgerrat Klima was commissioned by the civil society organization BürgerBegehren Klimaschutz (Citizens’ Climate Protection Initiative) and delivered by the participation consultancy firm ifok.

Our review of these four European climate assemblies revealed there is no standardised, codified practice for governance, but a variety of approaches to their governing structures and principles. Despite these differences, there are some broad, cross-cutting themes.

Two fields of power

Two different fields of power need to be considered to understand the governance of CAs: commissioning and delivery. The politics of commissioning is concerned with the decision to organise an assembly, and the politics of delivery is concerned more with the specific design and the day-to-day problems of implementing it. We separate the two because often, the commissioning encompassed a different set of stakeholders than the delivery.

The politics of commissioning has substantial effects on the assembly, often placing constraints on the agenda, the length of the process, and the participant selection. These early decisions often drive much of the politics of delivery by creating political, time and budgetary imperatives that shape delivery decisions. This draws attention to the fact that the governance of a CA starts substantially before the point at which we usually consider a CA to “begin.” Therefore, the governance of a CA has to go beyond the governance of its delivery to also consider processes that govern commissioning.

One way to approach the governance of commissioning CAs is to involve stakeholders like experts on citizen participation and the assembly’s topics before the tender goes out and before starting the CA. This helps to include diverse viewpoints when defining what a good process should look like, how the issue at hand can be addressed in a balanced way and how the governance structure needs to be arranged to achieve the CA’s goals. Making these considerations transparent to the parties involved in governing the process helps create process guidelines that define the roles and responsibilities of each actor and provide guidance in facilitating the CA.

Informality vs formality

A common finding across our cases (although less so for the French CCC) is that both the governance of commissioning and of delivery was largely characterised by informal, ad hoc decision-making amongst small networks of key stakeholders. There were few formal governance procedures, for instance, for managing disputes or arriving at decisions within these teams. In most cases, it was informally clear to all who held the authoritative decision-making power, and other stakeholders viewed their roles as predominantly advisory. In the case of the KBR Luxembourg, for example, the facilitator held the decision-making power over the delivery of the process, taking advice from outside participation experts, such as academic experts on citizen deliberation.

The one departure from the overall informality was the shift from commissioning to delivery, which tends to be regulated through a formal contractual arrangement between the commissioner and delivery

organisation(s). In the case of CAUK, for example, the commissioner defined the framework conditions for the topic and the design of the Citizens' Assembly in the invitation to tender, and then delivery organisations bid to run the process with a specific design. This meant the broad contours of the process design were defined in the contract between the commissioner and the delivery organisation.

Informal governance arrangements functioned relatively well in these cases. There were no reports of irresolvable political conflicts between the stakeholders and even reports that the informal coordination was beneficial in some ways – for example, it enabled flexible responses to ongoing challenges of delivery. In the Luxembourg case, this flexibility allowed the KBR to react to complaints by the participants and adapt the process design to add a further weekend of deliberation. Such informal governance arrangements tend to function best amongst small teams with high levels of trust, who are united by striving towards a common goal. They become harder to sustain as the number of stakeholders proliferates, particularly when this introduces diverse goals and values. As such, this should be factored into considerations of how well this can work for more complex global assemblies.

Informality and Governance Principles

The informality of governance arrangements shaped the (lack of) attention to key governance principles of independence, transparency, and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (DEI).

Transparency

These informal governance arrangements make it difficult to be transparent about how the CA is governed and how key decisions on design and delivery were made. We found through our interviews that those involved in organising the CA could not always clearly describe the process or rationale for process design decisions. The processes were not fully transparent to insiders and are unlikely to be transparent to the wider public and other outside stakeholders.

Independence

We do not find any evidence for commissioners attempting to determine the outcomes of a CA. Nevertheless, the informal governance arrangements also make it difficult to make clear judgements about levels of independence from the commissioners. Even when there was a separation between the actors who commissioned the CA and the actors who delivered the CA, the actors who commissioned the process held power in the informal governance arrangements. It is, therefore, possible that informal accommodation to the

commissioner occurs in these processes. To address these challenges, the process should be transparent about the role of the commissioner in the governance structure and its competencies. Anticipating scrutiny of the independence of the process, as well as including oversight bodies in the governance structure, are ways to contribute to a commitment of all involved actors to ensure processes' independence.

Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion

Similarly, EDI was mostly dealt with in an informal, ad hoc way. The Climate Assembly UK was an exception here, adopting several proactive measures to ensure high levels of care for participants, developing codes of conduct, offering independent points of contact for complaints, and creating rest spaces in the event venue. Nevertheless, the focus was still mainly on informal relationship building between participants and organisers, rather than, for instance, adopting formalised mechanisms of dispute resolution. We also did not find any examples of processes for robustly dealing with complaints from outside of a CA.

Governing the politics of process design

Our cases show there is little common practice in the governance of the main aspects of process design: agenda setting, participant selection, expert selection, event design, and post-event follow-up.

There was significant variation amongst the CAs on when and how these were governed. Agenda setting, for example, can be divided into two stages: setting the overarching terms of reference and selecting the topics within that agenda. In the UK, both aspects came from the commissioners, whilst in the KBR Luxembourg, the first fell into the commissioning phase and the second in the delivery stage. The German Bürgerrat Klima implemented a multi-staged process involving politicians, experts, and representative population surveys to determine the sub-topics of the CA, thereby securing the relevance of the CA to all three actors.

The cases also adopted different governance practices to choose the experts who were giving inputs to the participants and advising the deliverers of the CA. In the UK, they were either suggested and/or signed off by the commissioners. In France, they were decided on by the governing structure, and in Luxembourg by the delivery body, whereas in Germany, advisory committees composed of researchers from social and climate sciences were heavily involved in choosing the experts.

Decisions on these aspects of a CA can have important implications for their broader legitimacy both amongst decision-makers and the public. There is no one right way to organise a CA. We saw a good example of this in event design. In the Luxembourg KBR, the adoption of mainly plenary discussions to allow all participants to deliberate on each topic and craft recommendations was criticised for not allowing deep deliberation. On the contrary, in the French CCC, the use of small working groups to allow deep deliberation in creating recommendations led to criticism for only including the views of a small number of people in each recommendation. The fact that both processes were criticised for exactly opposite reasons demonstrates there are important trade-offs in governing process design considerations that will always be subject to challenge from outside.

Organisers should be aware that process design choices can be politicised. Accordingly, it is important for the legitimacy of the process that such decisions are made with a clear and communicable rationale that can convince external stakeholders. Anticipating scrutiny and involving stakeholders in design choices can help support legitimacy.

Participant involvement in governance

As with the other design elements, we found little commonality about how the assembly members should be involved in the governance of the CA. Thus far, there is no standard practice on which aspects of governance participants should be involved in, how many of them should be involved, and in what ways. Active participant involvement was mainly ad hoc involvement in questions about the length of the process and expert selection. The exception was the French CCC, which included two citizens on its governing body and the German Bürgerrat Klima, which made use of milestone meetings with two participants from each working group. A lack of clarity on participant involvement was a source of dissatisfaction among the participants. To avoid this dissatisfaction, we recommend a clear plan for active participant involvement in governance that is communicated and agreed upon with participants in advance.

Governing in multilingual settings

Out of the four cases, only the Luxembourg KBR took place in a multilingual setting, where the Assembly operated in three languages: French, Luxembourgish, and German. The group discussions were divided according to Assembly Members' first language. Language did not prove to be a major governance issue. In a multilingual nation-state like Luxembourg, which language groups should be included is already well codified through official

languages, and much of the population speaks more than one language. However, due to budgetary reasons, the final report has only been published in French, making it less accessible for all citizens of Luxembourg, which is a significant barrier to EDI. A global assembly faces much deeper challenges in relation to language inclusion, but there was not a great deal that could be learned from European national examples about solving these challenges.

Embedding a global citizens' assembly in the European context

The European context provides both an opportunity and a challenge for conducting global citizens' assemblies. In many European countries, citizens' assemblies have now become accepted as a good practice for understanding citizens' perspectives on important policy issues. There is a range of civil society organisations, which often work together in pan-European networks, committed to supporting deliberative citizen participation and with multiple experiences of conducting these processes. There is also little resistance from government actors to adopting them, and often a willingness to offer financial support on local, national, and European levels. This means that there is a substantial capacity that a global assembly could leverage. The challenge is that this high level of professionalisation of deliberative initiatives sets up certain expectations about what constitutes a good process, which may be expensive to deliver and conflict with the constraints of operating in other regions with fewer resources and less capacity. This could result in negative scrutiny of a global citizens' assembly when such constraints force it to depart from what might be seen as 'best practice' within Europe or tensions between partners in Europe and partners in other parts of the world.

Key Findings – Latin America

We examined six case studies of citizen deliberation processes in Latin America.

- Citizens' Jury in Chihuahua – a citizens' assembly in the Mexican state of Chihuahua on anticorruption policy. The Jury was commissioned and supported by the Chihuahua State Anti-Corruption Secretariat.
- Decidadania – a multiple citizens' assemblies project in the Brazilian municipalities of Salvador, Francisco Morato and Toritama on climate change mitigation. The assemblies were commissioned by the three municipalities, organized by Delibera Brazil and supported by the National Endowment for Democracy.
- (Re) surgentes – a multiple citizens' assemblies project in Mexico, Colombia, Brazil and Argentina on climate change. The assemblies are organised by Democracia en Red, Instituto del Sur Urbano, Delibera Brasil, Extituto and iDeemos, and supported by Open Society Foundation.
- Itinerant Citizens' Assembly in Bogota – a multiple citizens' assembly project in Bogotá on urban planning. The assemblies were commissioned by the Bogotá City Council, organised by the DemoLab and its partner institutions (Extituto, Corona, iDeemos, Avina, FESCOL, Diseño Público, Grupo Social, The Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy), and supported by the Bogotá City Council and the partner institutions.
- Lxs 400 – a deliberative poll in Chile on constitutional reform. The deliberative poll was organised by the Tribu Foundation, the Deliberative Democracy Lab at Stanford University, NN Chile, the University of Chile and the Chilean Association of Municipalities.
- The Youth Citizens' Assembly in Colombia – a citizens' assembly in Colombia on youth policy. The assembly was organised by The Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy and iDeemos and supported by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency.

Here are our findings.

Low impact

Citizens' assemblies in Latin America rarely have an impact. This could be due to the lack of political will as well as the lack of coordination with policymakers.

Giving reasons for not accepting recommendations is a minimum deliberative requirement that should be met in the assemblies.² If the authorities do not accept the recommendations of the citizens' assembly, at least they should provide an explanation. We found that the lack of explanation in some experiences had undermined mutual respect between the authorities and citizens. In the Chihuahua case, for instance, the coordinating committee tasked with integrating the recommendations of the citizens' jury into the anti-corruption policy declined to provide justification for the exclusion of these recommendations.

A practical and simple step to address this is to establish a dialogue with the authorities prior to hosting the assemblies to clarify possibilities for citizens' recommendations to make an impact. Identifying additional local and international institutional actors who can assume the responsibility of reviewing and providing feedback on the recommendations enhances the likelihood of the recommendations being incorporated into public policy. Organisers need to be transparent with the participating citizens about the limits on the impact of their recommendations. National assemblies can more readily identify relevant institutions, and less so is the case for decision-making in global governance.

Organisers should also plan concrete publicity actions such as press conferences, meetings with citizens, and accountability meetings to discuss the recommendations. Ideally, these activities should be overseen by an authority different from the authority that rejected the recommendations.

DemoLab and its partners executed various initiatives to enhance visibility and promote the adoption of recommendations within the Bogotá Council:

- DemoLab collaborated with the Bogotá City Council to organise a public session for the review of the Itinerant Citizens' Assembly (ICA) results.
- Some councillors formed a special commission to deliberate on the recommendations of the assembly. This commission presented the results of the three chapters during the Council's plenary session on October 6, 2023.

² OECD (2021) Evaluation Guidelines for Representative Deliberative Processes. Paris: OECD. https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/governance/evaluation-guidelines-for-representative-deliberative-processes_10ccbfc-b-en

- The ICA was registered on the Portal and Latinno platforms as a new deliberative democracy methodology.
- The OIDP (International Observatory on Participatory Democracy) acknowledged the ICA as a noteworthy practice of deliberative democracy in the Global South.
- The OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) recognised the ICA as one of the eight ways to institutionalise deliberative democracy.
- On October 10, 2023, a debate among candidates for the next mayor of Bogotá took place, and several recommendations from the 2023 ICA were utilised to formulate questions for the candidates.

Small budgets

We remain attentive to the stark contrasts in budget allocations for citizens' assemblies between countries in the Global South and the Global North. Even the relatively well-funded cases in Latin America fall short in comparison to the less generously funded instances in Europe. For instance, *Resurgentes* received a budget of 200,000 USD for four assemblies, whereas the most economical case we examined in Europe was approximately 500,000 USD. While some Latin American assemblies operate with tens of thousands of dollars, their European counterparts may command budgets in the millions of dollars.

According to the OECD, the average cost of a citizens' assembly in Europe is 1,822,775.33 Euros. The Climate Assembly in France incurred a cost of approximately five million euros, whereas the third "chapter" of the Itinerant Citizens' Assembly had a budget of around ten thousand dollars. Under these circumstances, we wonder if we are talking about the same thing. Probably, we are not.

Citizens' assemblies are democratic institutions, and as such, they need budgetary compromise on the part of the state. With limited funding, these processes rely extensively on the voluntary work of experts, moderators, and rapporteurs. With limited resources, implementing some of the recommendations outlined in this report concerning governance structures becomes challenging for organisers. Establishing a comprehensive governance system demands staff, time, and resources. In instances like those observed in Latin America, where these elements are lacking, organisers must prioritise other critical aspects of the assemblies, such as participant recruitment or remuneration.

Learning among organisers

Organisations in local and national projects and clusters of organisations in regional or transnational projects can learn from each other when they work together, as is currently happening in the *Resurgentes* Climate Assemblies project. In this project, sharing experiences among organisations on conducting the lotteries has expanded the possibilities and ways of thinking about random selection in the Global South. In this initiative, there is also a methodological group with all the organisations that make the key decisions. This brings inclusiveness, helps avoid mistakes, and can help ensure political neutrality.

The *Grupo de Conteúdo* in Brazil is a mechanism to ensure that key methodological decisions are under scrutiny from different angles. In each of the Brazilian cases we examined, such a group was present. Taking the Salvador Assembly as an example, 41 organisations/individuals were invited to join the group, and out of these, 14 actively participated. These 14 members represented NGOs/social movements, the legislative and executive branches, and universities. Frequently, organisers sought the input of these groups before making significant methodological decisions.

Meanwhile, in Bogotá, the design of the CA was based on a dialogue between different visions with different types of expertise since several organisations formed the DemoLab. The DemoLab had no hierarchies; all organisations participated with equal voices and votes. No political or other group co-opted the ICA design and implementation process. Not all organisations had the same political positions, and these differences were respected. Apart from establishing the laboratory in collaboration with various organisations on an equal footing, another crucial factor for the success of this process was political support. The President of the Bogotá City Council played a highly active role in shaping and implementing the ICA during the year of DemoLab's initiation. With an interest in public innovation, the President actively engaged in the design, visibility campaigns, and the opening and closing plenary sessions. The ICA was incorporated into the Council's four-year plan and officially recognised as an innovation mechanism in the Council's Resolution 550 of 2020. This institutionalisation of the Assembly formed the basis for implementing the itinerant model of the Assembly.

We believe that in a global citizens' assembly, it is very important to keep this diversity and to avoid top-down structures with a strong accent of Global North countries.

Lack of codes of ethics

There is a lack of codes of ethics in the Latin American processes. For example, there were no clear rules on the privacy of members' data and procedures for

receiving and responding to participants' complaints. Although none of the Latin American cases we studied had a public code of ethics or established procedures for conflict resolution, the conflicts that did arise were handled informally by the organisers.

Design considerations relevant to governance

Methodological minimums to balance the global and local

The Climate Assemblies project set a methodological minimum or design elements that must be included in all the assemblies. The minimums enable the organisers to maintain a methodological unity to guarantee that all the assemblies are coordinated and work according to the same design and with the same objectives. At the same time, each organisation has the autonomy to make decisions about the particularities of local contexts. This design flexibility allows organisers to respond to the varying considerations in each territory. The design of the Climate Assemblies project is a good standard for global projects. National organisations could have a say in the general governance and, at the same time, some independence to adapt their local designs.

Sequenced models of deliberation

A global citizens' assembly can be a one-time process, or it can use some form of sequential deliberation. For example, in the Itinerant Citizens' Assembly model, different assemblies take place in different parts of the world and can be linked so that the recommendations of one chapter feed the deliberations of another. The itinerant model is grounded in the following principles:

- **Plural Deliberation:** This involves the assembly comprising different "chapters" or assemblies.
- **Distributed Deliberation:** Each chapter performs a distinct function within the broader deliberation, such as setting the agenda, defining the public problem, proposing solutions, or conducting evaluations.
- **Sequenced Deliberation:** Each chapter aims to learn from the preceding ones.

A global assembly could adopt a similar sequenced model, constructing a chain of assemblies across various regions with efforts to establish connections among them. This interconnected design allows each assembly to draw insights from its predecessors.

Deliberative enclaves

In the Youth Citizens' Assembly in Colombia, there were two enclave focus groups that were very useful in identifying recommendations from a particular perspective. One of these groups was made up of women with diversity in terms of territory, age, ethnic groups, and membership in the LGTBIQ+ community. Governance systems could follow a similar approach by including specific inputs from groups with significant stakes in the issues the assembly is set to deliberate upon.



Ten Recommendations for Governing Global Assemblies

1. Create transparent governance structures.

We found that CAs often functioned well with informal governance structures in our respective national contexts. However, we are sceptical that such informal arrangements would work in a global citizens' assembly, where there is a greater number and diversity of stakeholders involved. We recommend creating a governance structure with a clear and transparent division of labour, definitions of roles and responsibilities (especially decision-making powers), and explanations of the rationale for any decision. This also extends to the role of oversight bodies. The closest example of such a governance structure from our case was the French Climate Assembly. However, this was also an atypically high-profile and well-resourced assembly, so it should not be seen as a template to follow for all assemblies. It may be more difficult, or even disproportionate, to create such an extensive governance structure in other contexts.

2. Open the commissioning process to a range of stakeholders.

Decisions in the commissioning process of a CA have substantial effects on the assembly. This places constraints on the agenda, length of the process, and participant selection. Yet, a closed group commonly makes these decisions without input from relevant stakeholders. Given the unlikelihood of consensus about what constitutes a good process, we recommend a more inclusive commissioning process that could generate agreement on the process design. The *Grupo de Conteúdo* in the Brazilian case and the *Bürgerrat Klima* in Germany serve as illustrative examples of more active engagement of diverse stakeholders in the commissioning, allowing them to have a voice and a vote in crucial decisions related to the assembly's design. In Brazil, each assembly had its own *Grupo de Conteúdo*, comprised of various institutional and civil society entities, which played a crucial role in shaping the assembly by offering insights into environmental issues and providing advice to the lead group on conflict resolution.

3. Make space for mutual learning between decision-makers.

The diversity of stakeholders of a global citizens' assembly means there may be different expectations concerning what constitutes a good process, as well as a wealth of experiences in different local contexts. It is important to make space to discuss these expectations and share knowledge. This is especially valuable in the context of a global citizens' assembly to ensure that the process is not dominated by Global North knowledge or priorities that are then imposed upon the stakeholders from other countries. The Latin America section provides examples of such collaboration. DemoLab, for instance, emerged from a partnership between the Bogotá City Council and seven civic organisations that effectively collaborated and learned together to launch the Itinerant Citizens' Assembly. In the Brazilian cases, the *Grupo de Conteúdo* served as an innovative approach, enabling stakeholders to actively participate in the process and learn alongside the organisers. In the *Resurgentes* project, consortium organisations play a central role in decision-making, convening every 15 days to assess the progress of each assembly. The engagement of multiple organisations in the design and implementation of the assemblies fosters a diversity of experiences and perspectives.

4. Govern with sensitivity to the local context.

At its core, a global citizens' assembly is successful when it joins actors from widely varying political contexts working in countries with different experiences of participation and deliberation and with different levels of capacity and access to resources. An effective governance structure requires governing with sensitivity to these contextual factors. We recommend an approach developed by the Climate Assemblies Project in Latin America, where stakeholders agreed on a “methodological minimum” that all partners can subscribe to combined with organisational autonomy beyond the agreed minimum (see Key Insights – Latin America). This enables national organisations to have a say in the overall governance and, at the same time, some independence to contextualise the demands of local communities. At the same time, local practices can enrich the CA's deliberation, as demonstrated in the Asian cases, such as how the Philippines CA deals with emotional assembly members by facilitating a one-to-one talk with them. Also, the consensus conference in Hong Kong established an understanding with individuals who disagreed with the majority views but agreed to present the recommendations since their minority views were still conveyed to the government.

5. Use global citizens' assemblies for deliberative capacity building.

A key finding of our comparative analysis is the divergence in financial and institutional resources for organising citizens' assemblies across different contexts. A global citizens' assembly operates across these contexts and must decide the right way to distribute its resources given these antecedent inequalities. There are multiple potential approaches for resource distribution in a global citizens' assembly. We suggest that resources could be distributed based on the principle of equity rather than equality. Where capacity is already high, organisers can capitalise on this capacity and then focus project resources on places currently at low capacity. We could even consider the sharing of resources, perhaps starting from the regional level (coordinated by regional institutions).

6. Transparently communicate the rationale for process design decisions.

There is no one correct way to organise a CA. A series of complex decisions and trade-offs between different priorities mark their design and implementation. These trade-offs can later be politicised by those who wish to de-legitimise the CA and its recommendations. It is, then, important for the legitimacy of a CA that such decisions anticipate future scrutiny. This is especially the case when the design departs, for good reasons, from what might be considered the norm. For example, while sortition or random selection was untenable in most of the CAs in East Asia, other principles such as inclusiveness and diversity were operationalised in a more differentiated/disaggregated way. Therefore, process design decisions should be supported by a clearly communicated rationale to all stakeholders. Anticipating scrutiny and involving stakeholders in the design process could also help to generate legitimacy for the design.

7. Agree on a clear plan for participant involvement.

There was no standard approach to involving participants or Assembly Members in the CAs we examined. Participant involvement often developed in an ad hoc way. Moreover, we found that in several cases, Assembly Members or participants were dissatisfied with the lack of clarity on their roles. To avoid this dissatisfaction, we recommend creating a clear plan for active participant involvement in governance at the beginning of any CA. This is important in contexts with low trust or little familiarity between some participants and the commissioners/organisers.

8. Develop an impartial system for expert selection.

The impartiality or balance of expert witnesses invited to testify in a CA is key to whether the commissioning authority, policymakers, and other stakeholders in the wider community will accept its recommendations. We did not find a standard practice for expert selection in our case studies. In some Latin American experiences, experts were selected directly by the organisers, which raises concerns about integrity and independence. It is necessary to develop a process that ensures appropriate and impartial selection of experts. In European cases, there has been a greater emphasis on impartiality in expert witness selection. In the French Convention, for instance, there was a set of “guarantors” tasked with monitoring and ensuring the impartiality and plurality of expert inputs.

9. Plan for impact.

The impact of a CA requires thoughtful planning. For example, CAs conducted with authorities need to be based on a dialogue that clarifies the possible outcomes of the assembly, i.e. answering to “how will the authorities deal with the recommendations?”. We agree with the OECD’s report³ that giving reasons for not accepting a recommendation of the CA is the minimum deliberative requirement and evidence of mutual respect between the authorities and citizens. This has been the practice in Singapore, where the commissioner, MCCY, published an official report that comprehensively addressed every recommendation and explained the reasons for prioritising the immediate adoption of some while considering others for future implementation.

For global citizens’ assemblies where there may be no authoritative decision-maker, it is still possible to plan for impact. For example, similar agreements could be made with prominent civil society organisations and other relevant stakeholders about how they would respond to the Assembly’s recommendations. These agreements should also be combined with a plan for post-assembly activities, such as press conferences and oversight meetings, to connect the assembly to the broader public and generate pressure for implementation. A good example of this was the German Bürgerrat Klima, which was also commissioned and carried out by civil society organisations and had no direct connection to authoritative political institutions. It attempted from the beginning to create a base of supportive civil society stakeholders who would then lobby for the recommendations of the Assembly in the future.

³ OECD (2021) Evaluation Guidelines for Representative Deliberative Processes. Paris: OECD. https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/governance/evaluation-guidelines-for-representative-deliberative-processes_10ccbfc-b-en

10. Develop and apply an ethical code of conduct for governing assemblies.

We found that in many cases, there was a lack of attention to clearly articulating the principles that directed the governance of the assembly. We recommend that a global citizens' assembly develops a code of conduct for governing that is agreed upon with all involved stakeholders. We suggest this code of conduct should include the following:

1. Duty of care toward participants: from protecting the privacy of their data, to attention to their well-being during the assembly.
2. Creating a transparent process for managing internal and external complaints, in the best case, independent from the commissioners and organisers of the Assembly.

These ten recommendations show that, though there is no single best practice template design for a citizens' assembly that can simply be applied to all contexts, there are many good practices from previous cases to which a global assembly can turn for inspiration. By drawing the lessons from three different global regions, we have ensured that the recommendations are sensitive to the range of contexts that a global assembly must operate in. There are some challenges in generalising practices from local and national initiatives to the global level. Nevertheless, we believe that these recommendations provide a useful starting point for stimulating thinking regarding how to improve the governance of global assemblies in ways that are both ambitious and realistic.

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