

Foreword

The increasing complexity of policy making and the failure to find solutions to some of the most pressing policy problems have prompted politicians, policy makers, civil society organisations, and citizens to reflect on how collective public decisions should be taken in the twenty-first century. There is a need for new ways to find common ground and take action. This is particularly true for issues that are values-based, require trade-offs, and demand long-term solutions. The OECD has collected evidence and data that support the idea that citizen participation in public decision making can deliver better policies, strengthen democracy, and build trust. This report focuses on representative deliberative processes in particular, as part of a wider effort by democratic institutions to become more participatory and open to informed citizen input and collective intelligence.

Assembling ordinary citizens from all parts of society to deliberate on complex political questions and develop collective proposals has become increasingly attractive in this context. Over the past few decades, the ‘deliberative wave’ has been building. Public authorities at all levels of government have been using Citizens’ Assemblies, Juries, Panels, and other representative deliberative processes. In these processes, randomly selected citizens, making up a microcosm of a community, spend significant time learning and collaborating through facilitated deliberation to develop informed collective recommendations for public authorities.

In many ways, combining the principles of deliberation (careful and open discussion to weigh evidence about an issue), representativeness (achieved through random sampling from which a representative selection is made), and impact (with a link to public decision making) is not new. This combination of principles is rooted in ancient Athenian democracy and were applied throughout history until two to three centuries ago. It is their modern application, to complement representative democratic institutions that make such processes innovative today.

As the use of representative deliberative processes proliferates, this report provides evidence to guide policy makers on good practices and options for institutionalising citizen deliberation. It is the first empirical comparative study that analyses how deliberative processes are being used for public decision making around the world. Drawing on data collected from 289 case studies (282 from OECD countries) from 1986 to October 2019, and in collaboration with an international advisory group, the OECD has identified twelve distinct models of deliberative processes, evaluated what a ‘successful’ process entails, developed good practice principles, and explored three routes to institutionalising citizen deliberation. This research and proposals for action fit within the organisation’s work on innovative citizen participation, which seeks to guide countries on the implementation of provisions 8 and 9 of the 2017 OECD Recommendation on Open Government.

Growing efforts to embed public deliberation into public decision making could be seen as the start of a period of transformation to adapt the architecture of representative democracy. Democratic institutions across the world are beginning to transform in ways that give citizens a more direct role in setting agendas and shaping the public decisions that affect them. Based on extensive data and analysis, this OECD report contributes to the emerging international evidence base about these trends and helps public authorities implement good practices and consider routes to institutionalising citizen deliberation.



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