

Future of Institutions

DIALOGUE SUMMARY

Title/topic:

Building deliberative democracy

Organizers:

Berggruen Institute

Key takeaways:

One of the most important challenges we face is the decline in trust for our democratic institutions. This decline was precipitated by the advent of a highly fragmented digital media ecosystem that is awash in misinformation. This ecosystem has contributed to deepening polarization and social distrust, even driving people to extremism and conspiratorial thinking. Without shared sense-making, our ability for legitimate collective decision-making (i.e., government) is compromised.

We need to reinvent our concept of democracy to place the citizen at the center of the democratic process, whereby the government serves as a facilitator and platform for citizen deliberation. In this Dialogue, participants put forth a 10-year goal and near-midterm actions for a potential shared movement. Participants encourage an expansive view of institutions, which can include creation of organizational entities, as well as societal norms and meaningful practices, to embrace deliberative democracy.

Key points raised in this Dialogue include:

- There is no one, single institution that needs to be established to make deliberative democracy emerge. Rather, a very large number of institutions at various levels of society and politics must be built.
- There are many possible ways to move the movement forward. Each one is bound by the unique political, social, and cultural circumstances of the country, region, province, or state.
- There is a need for transformation in our understanding of what qualifies as democracy. Norms, practices, and skill sets must then be evenly distributed throughout society to achieve that democracy.

The challenge(s):

- *Resistance of Policymakers.* Political representatives are hesitant because they are concerned about losing power, and because they simply do not trust the public. The distrust between the people and their government is reciprocal: people distrust their governments and policymakers distrust the public. Public engagement is thus viewed as a risk. Policymakers need to understand the value of the process of engaging with the public.
- *Risk of Corruption of Citizen Assemblies.* Citizen Assemblies can be used by populists for illiberal purposes.
- *Ensuring Equity.* For the sake of equity, to right the wrongs of the past and to amplify the voices of those most impacted, many want to create assemblies wherein some groups are over-represented. This may compromise the integrity of the process. On the other hand,

Conservatives will use the over-indexing as grounds for dismissal (e.g., liberal ploy).

Insights for the Future of Institutions:

- Creating a roadmap forward will be challenging, as implementing deliberative democracy is highly context-specific.
- In institutionalizing citizens' assemblies, how do we avoid becoming a part of the culture wars? How can we provide institutional comfort, support, and encouragement to ensure the other side will come out to play?

Solutions:

Dialogue participants suggest that the path to institutionalizing citizens' assemblies requires: Socializing the idea → Innovating and showing experiments → Evaluating and capacity building → Growing the network → Institutionalizing

Possible paths forward include:

- *Start with something controversial at a very large scale* (i.e., national) to demonstrate efficacy to policymakers and the public.
- *Target those who do not want to be involved.* We need to hear those voices.
- *Choose the topic carefully.* Citizens' assemblies are not suitable for all problems. Avoid topics that will deter policymakers (i.e., electoral reform).
- *Crawl-Walk-Run.* Even in places where these tools are farthest along (i.e., Ireland), the timing is not yet right for a move away from elector representative democracy.
- *Take a stepwise approach to institutionalization.* The path forward must progress from a trial to a wave of participatory processes until it becomes a norm. Only then can it be institutionalized.
- *Focus on regulation,* and scale enable the greatest number of participants.

Participants:

- Carsten Berg, The ECI Campaign
- Kyle Bozentko, New Democratic Processes
- Ieva Cesnulaityte, DemocracyNext
- Claudia Chwalisz, DemocracyNext
- Linn Davis, Healthy Democracy
- Yves Dejaeghere, FIDE
- Marjan H. Ehsassi, Johns Hopkins University
- Mahmud Farooque, Consortium for Science, Policy and Outcomes
- Nils Gilman, Berggruen Institute
- Hollie Russon Gilman, New America Foundation
- H  l  ne Landemore, Yale University
- Christine Landfried, University of Hamburg
- Matt Leighninger, National Conference on Citizenship
- Peter MacLeod, MASS LBP
- Dawn Nakagawa, Berggruen Institute
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- Art O'Leary, Electoral Commission of Ireland
- Alex Renirie, Healthy Democracy
- Rahmin Sarabi, Democracy Together
- David Schechter, Democracy R&D Network
- David Van Reybrouck, Bard University