



Alliance for
Useful Evidence

Evidence vs Democracy

How 'mini-publics' can traverse
the gap between citizens,
experts, and evidence

Jonathan Breckon, Anna Hopkins, Ben Rickey

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Introduction

"The people of England deceive themselves when they fancy they are free; they are so, in fact, only during the election of members of parliament. As soon as they are elected, they are again in chains, and are nothing."

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*¹

"Contemporary representative democracy is tired, vindictive, paranoid, self-deceiving, clumsy and frequently ineffectual. Much of the time it is living on past glories. But current democracy is not who we are. It is just a system of government, which we built and we can replace. So why don't we replace it with something better?"

David Runciman, *How Democracy Ends*²

Democracy and evidence are not happy bedfellows. Evidence is slow, uncertain, and jargon-heavy. It deals in shades of grey. Politicians deal in black and white. They need to be decisive, get off the fence, and sell their ideas to the public and interest groups.

Traversing these two worlds is not easy. One former senior British government minister described it as 'proles vs the pointy-heads': or, the people vs the experts. The usual modus operandi of modern politics is for the 'pointy-head' experts to side-step the public: go directly to politicians and bureaucrats, by sitting on expert scientific committees, writing dense policy briefings, or seconding themselves inside government. They can work behind closed doors, such as through technical arms-length bodies like the Plan Bureaus in Netherlands, or the Productivity Commission in Australia, and avoid having to rub shoulders with the wider public.

But that elitist and technocratic approach will not wash. The people want more. They will not put up with being 'in chains' between elections, as Rousseau accused the English. The rise in reactionary populism reflects a dissatisfaction with elites running things on the public's behalf. Anti-establishment political groups are shaking up nations, such as Italy's Five Star movement, the Alternative for Germany party, Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, or US President Trump.

Working behind closed doors does not help politicians who will, eventually, have to sell their policies to the public.³ And selling a policy based on nuanced statistical evidence, in a sound-bite, manifesto or a Tweet, is not easy. On highly politicised and ideological issues, such as immigration or drugs policy, it may just be impossible for politicians to sell an evidence-informed policy. The 'politics of electoral anxiety' means that evidence can be *"trumped by the occupational conventions of politicians"*. Namely, the occupation of re-election.⁴ Citizens know this. They say that they distrust politicians. But, on the whole, they trust the scientists and the raw evidence. One poll in Britain found that 90 per cent of people trusted the accuracy of the Office for National Statistics, but only 26 per cent trusted the government to present official statistics honestly.⁵

Mini-publics offer an alternative democratic platform to connect the public with evidence. Citizens are given the space and time to think. They do this by meeting in small groups, randomly chosen, and have the chance to interrogate experts in the field in question. They get to grips with the trade-offs on controversial budgets or constitutional issues, such as the UK's funding of adult social care, Victoria's obesity strategy, or Ontario's housing legislation.⁶ The core features of mini-publics are described by two leading UK scholars in this field, researchers Oliver Escobar and Stephen Elstub, who have first-hand experience of running several mini-publics, and helped author this report:

*"Firstly, the purpose of the approach being to gather together a 'microcosm of the public' with each citizen having the same chance of being selected to take part, secondly, those that take part are remunerated for their efforts, thirdly, discussions are facilitated and finally a number of so-called experts provide evidence to the participants who in turn question (or cross examine) them."*⁷

About this report

This report sets out the case for how mini-publics can help democracy connect with evidence. It is based on a review of the literature on mini-publics by Stephen Elstub and colleagues, and examines eight case studies, mostly from Europe. We reference these cases throughout the report, and they can be read in full in *Evidence use in mini-publics: eight case studies*.⁹ Our focus is primarily on social policy, but we also cover practical lessons from other areas – such as electoral reform in Canada, or planning for SARS or avian flu in Australia.

The core message is optimistic. It shows how the doom-mongers of democracy are wrong, and that voters can make informed decisions. The 'uneducated' electorate has always been a concern since the dawn of universal suffrage, from J.S. Mill who recommended giving extra votes to citizens with university degrees, to present-day political scientists like Jason Brennan, author of *Against Democracy*, who argues in favour of an 'epistocracy' – or 'rule of the knowers'. How could the great unwashed proletariat, the 'proles', ever understand the micro-economics of drug cost-effectiveness, say, or the epidemiological pandemic models for SARS or Ebola (see **Annex C** on the types of evidence we found used in mini-publics)? Yet in all the case studies described here, the citizens did understand the research, and they made wise decisions based on evidence. It wasn't easy. It was hard mental work. As Claire Bisquerra, a jury member from the French CNESCO Consensus Conference on primary school numeracy (see **Case study 7**) explained:

"I don't know how the other [jury members] got on with [the evidence document] but I had to underline it, reread it, ask my husband what he thought. I found it pretty dense. There were subjects I felt immediately excluded from, like number sense and numeration."

But Madame Bisquerra did stick it out in her mini-public, despite feeling excluded and uncomfortable with the 'dense' evidence she received. Juries can grapple with complex research, given time, patience, and empathetic expert witnesses.

However, there are two major challenges that mini-publics must confront: firstly, they need to move out of small niche political science circles. Mini-publics are not new. They have been around for decades – possibly even centuries, if you include the Ancient Athenian Council of 500, or the People's Court.¹⁰ There are some promising examples of mini-publics having real impact at the national level – not least the recent Citizens' Assemblies in Ireland (see **Box 1**). It is time now for mini-publics to enter the political mainstream, or risk more years in the wilderness.

Secondly, mini-publics need to get smarter in their use of experts and evidence. It is no longer acceptable to rely on single views. Scientists and scholars can be just as prone to cognitive biases as anybody else, like confirmation bias, cherry-picking research findings, or swaying public opinion via white-lab-coated academic 'halo effects'.¹¹ It is better to have systematic reviews or meta-analysis of all the available evidence, presented in a fair and accessible way, rather than rely on lone experts.

Subject coverage of this report

Some of the mini-publics we discuss are highly technical and scientific, such as the German Citizens' Jury on Gene Activated Matrix for Bone and Cartilage Regeneration on Arthritis. Or narrowly geographic: such as the group planning for floods in Gdansk, Poland. Or grander in scope, such as the attempt to reboot the dismal science of economics.

We don't define policy narrowly. But it is more than what goes on in central or local governments – there are also mini-publics focused on the policies of practice, such as the UK's National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, which has a 30-strong Citizen's Council that provides 'social value judgements' to underpin guidance for clinicians and health practitioners (see **Box 2**).

The archetypal mini-public only includes citizens that are randomly chosen or selectively sampled, but there are some cases where others are involved in deliberation, like professionals, parents, practitioners and others with direct interest in the topic. We cover these as well because they provide some interesting lessons and contain many of the same deliberative features, even though they don't exclusively contain lay members of the public.

1

Mini-publics: What are they exactly?

"Suppose an advanced democratic country were to create a 'minipopulus' consisting of perhaps a thousand citizens randomly selected out of the entire demos. Its task would be to deliberate, for a year perhaps, on an issue and then to announce its choices... one minipopulus could exist for each major issue on the agenda. A minipopulus could exist at any level of government – national, state, or local. It could be attended... by an advisory committee of scholars and specialists and by an administrative staff. It could hold hearings, commission research, and engage in debate and discussion... In these ways... the democratic process could be adapted once again to a world that little resembles the world in which democratic ideas and practices first came to life."

Robert Dahl, *Democracy and its Critics*¹²

The idea of mini-publics was first proposed by the political theorist Robert Dahl in the 1970s – and then again in his prize-winning book *Democracy and its Critics* in 1989. Dahl's 'minipopulus' was an assembly of citizens, demographically representative of the larger population, brought together to learn and deliberate on a topic in order to inform public opinion and decision-making.

Although the idea goes much further back than Dahl: Athenian classical democracy of the 5th and 4th centuries BCE did for a time select a small group of officials by lot. Rather than having decisions lie with power-hungry career politicians, the Greek rulers were chosen at random from the citizenry.¹³ For the Athenians, this was a cornerstone of democracy. In fact, this was a common view among political theorists from Aristotle, to Montesquieu and Rousseau.¹⁴

One relic of this classical past is the legal jury - another group still chosen by lot. Dahl and others have tried to widen this approach beyond judicial issues, and re-inject them back into democracy. Around the world, there have been many different kinds of mini publics, like Citizens' Juries, Consensus Conferences, and Deliberative Polls (see **Table 1**).

Mini-publics help the public be rational, civil and empirical. To achieve this, emotions and evidence have to be carefully orchestrated. When the meetings are well managed, the results can be striking. Observers of a deliberative opinion poll during the 1996 Presidential primaries for Bill Clinton and Bob Dole (see Box 10) were struck by *"the sense of common purpose, the demonstration of mutual respect, and the good sense of humour shared by most participants [that] created a group atmosphere, tolerant of conflicting views."*¹⁵ Deliberation is focussed on the quality of discussion; an exchange of views between different perspectives, that is well informed, takes account of new information, and encourages reflection on preferences and emotions.¹⁶

Meetings are usually face-to-face. Some mini-publics do have virtual aspects, such as webcasting citizen juries, or Skyping in experts. The Estonian People's Assembly crowd-sourced over 2,000 proposals for political and electoral reform using an online tool called Your Priorities, before a deliberative process narrowed them down.¹⁷ Digital democratic innovations can be an important part of the mini-public mix, so long as they enable wise thinking and collective intelligence.¹⁸

The forums need to give citizens the time to grasp the technicalities involved in controversial issues: on euthanasia or immigration in Denmark and Finland; on Protestant vs Catholic sectarianism in Northern Irish schools; on discrimination against the Roma in Bulgaria; on building more wind turbines and solar power in oil-rich Texas.

Box 1: Citizens' Assemblies in Ireland

In 2012 the Irish parliament commissioned a Constitutional Convention. This assembly was made up of randomly-selected citizens, politicians from both Houses of the Oireachtas, and the Northern Ireland Assembly, along with an independent chair. The Irish legislature asked the Convention to consider several topics, including the role of women in politics, the offence of blasphemy, same-sex marriage, and electoral reform.

One of the major impacts of the Convention was its recommendation to amend the Irish Constitution to allow same-sex couples to marry. In May 2015, the people of Ireland voted in a national referendum to fully adopt the Conventions' recommendation.¹⁹ This was the first time lesbian and gay marriage was

legalised by popular vote. Another Irish Citizens' Assembly, made recommendations on the Eighth Amendment – which concerns abortion. It was considered by a joint committee of politicians, who recommended a referendum to remove the Eighth Amendment from the Constitution. On 25 May 2018 the Irish voted to overturn the abortion ban by a majority of 66.4 per cent.²⁰

One interesting innovation in this model was mixing citizens with politicians, rather than the usual segregation of elected and voters. The success of the assembly and creation of real political change is down to what Dr Clodagh Harris, Senior Lecturer at University College Cork, describes as its *"complementary blend of participatory, deliberative, representative and direct forms of democracy."*²¹

The legitimacy of mini-publics lies in the way that they are not populated by vested interests – but the wider public. A common approach to selecting citizens is what's called stratified random sampling: a way of randomly selecting people from different demographic sub-groups, like age, gender, ethnicity, income, geography, and so on. Mini-publics are not usually intended to be statistically representative of the entire voting public, just to be demographically diverse. Only deliberative polls, which use bigger samples, attempt to represent the whole public (**see Table 1**). With a small sample, it would be impossible to reflect all of society. What is possible is the creation of a group that has legitimacy by being open to all – and not stuffed with lobbyists or professionals wedded to an outcome that suits their interests.²² The groups are carefully handled to avoid group-think, or the 'halo effect' of charismatic personalities, and are often sub-divided into smaller groups, using trained moderators. Facilitators are responsible for making sure the process is fair. Everyone has an equal opportunity to ask questions and raise concerns. Discussion remains focused on the topic. Participants must justify their opinions, and be respectful to each other.

In most kinds of mini-publics, facilitators also help the group reach a decision or produce a series of recommendations. This is done by consensus, or by open or private voting. The deliberations and outcomes of a mini public are often captured by researchers or observers, and sometimes the participants themselves, and written up in reports – for universities, the public, or policy-makers.

The people responsible for overseeing a mini-public – the Steering or Stewarding Group – have a key role in ensuring that no single perspective can take over. They are involved in the selection of members of the public and the experts, the creation of briefing documents, and often the topics put to the group for discussion. Their main job is to ensure quality – and prevent bias.

Five different types of mini-public

Dr Elstub has identified a few key dimensions of difference between mini publics: the number of participants and how representative they are; whether they produce a collective statement or individual votes; how much control citizens have over the process; and their impact on decision making.²³ All the examples contained in this report vary along these lines, but collectively, we found that they are being used to tackle a whole range of issues. Mini-publics are being used to:

- Clarify public perspectives on complex policy issues.
- Decide on policy priorities.
- Break political deadlocks or arbitrate between policy options.
- Increase public participation and understanding.
- Generate new policy ideas.

In the table below, we lay out the USP of four different types of mini-public that are being used in social policy - and some of their advantages and disadvantages.²⁴

Table 1: Key features of a mini public

	Citizens' Juries	Consensus conferences	Deliberative polls	Citizen assemblies
Developed by (first instance)	Crosby (USA, 1971)	Danish Board of Technology (1987)	James Fishkin (USA, 1994)	Gordon Gibson (Canada, 2002)
Some examples in our report	NHS Citizen Jury, part of the NHS Citizen Project (Case 6) Deliberative Forum on Pandemic Planning, Australia (Case 2) Citizens' Jury on Ageing, Finland (Case 4) NICE Citizens Council (see Box 2) Citizens' Jury on police-community engagement (see Box 3)	CNESCO Consensus Conference on primary education, France (Case 7) European Consensus Conference on Homelessness (Case 3) Consensus Conference on Reducing Reoffending, France (Case 5)	Deliberative Poll on education in Omagh, Northern Ireland (Case 1) Deliberative poll on crime in Manchester, UK (see Box 10, Annex A) Europolis' Deliberative Poll	Citizens' Assembly on Social Care, England (Case 8) British Columbia Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform Ireland Citizens' Assembly 2016 (see Box 1) Citizens' Assembly in Gdansk, Poland
Typical no. of citizens	12-26	10-25	100-500	50-160
Cost	£10,000 - £30,000	£30,000 - £100,000	c£200,000	c£300,000 - £3,000,000 ²⁵
No. of meetings	2-5 days ²⁶	7-8 days	2-3 days	20-30 days
Selection method	Random selection	Random + self-selection	Random selection	Random + self-selection
USP and key benefits	The least time and resource intensive type of mini public, with clearly defined structure and usually run by trained facilitators. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Often the most realistic to run • Clear set of structures and processes, with many organisations experienced in running them. • Used to reach a hard and fast 'verdict' or generate recommendations.- A small group can allow high quality deliberation. 	Learning over time allows participants to become familiar with the topic and issues involved, and to select experts or witnesses. This gives the public more control over the deliberative process. ²⁷ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning phase gives people time to consider complex research. • Participants have more control and can make sure their learning needs are met. • Recommendations can have more detailed explanations. 	Survey results from a large group of citizens are compared before and after a deliberative event. They aim to show what the wider public would think, if they had time to deliberate. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A tried and tested method, developed by researchers at Stanford University. • Scientific sampling and a much larger group means that you can make claims about a wider population. • Individual surveys mean participants aren't forced to reach a group decision. 	With concrete links to decision-making and recommendations aimed at government, this is an ambitious way to involve the public in a learning, deliberation and decision-making process over many months. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Links to policy-making and broad consultation makes them the most democratically innovative. • They involve a larger number of citizens, over a longer period of time. • Some examples so far have had serious impact.
What are potential cons?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shorter time frames could make it harder to tackle complex issues. • A small group limits the perspectives that can be represented in the room. • They're usually a one off - they don't engage the public over time. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A small sample limits the range of opinions in the room. • More resource intensive than a Citizens' Jury, and requires participants commit more of their time. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large sample size means that Deliberative Polls are expensive to run. • Unlike other types of mini-publics, these don't produce recommendations. • Individual surveys mean less deliberation and consensus building. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A long, expensive and resource intensive process. • Political buy-in from a legislature or executive needed.
Result	Collective position report	Collective position report	Survey opinions	Detailed recommendation
Destination of proposal	Sponsor and mass media	Sponsor and mass media	Sponsor and mass media	Parliament, government and public referendum

Adapted from Elstub, S. and McLaverty, P. (Eds.), *Deliberative Democracy: Issues and Cases*, Edinburgh University Press.

2

The benefits of mini-publics for democracy and evidence

"Democracy works when its detailed designs amplify thoughtful inputs and constrain the less constructive ones, just as juries work well thanks to rules that prevent the crowd from being foolish."

Geoff Mulgan, *Big Mind: How Collective Intelligence Can Change Our World*²⁸

Mini-publics allow citizens to be citizens. Instead of the potential herd-like foolishness of Facebook filter bubbles, clicktivism, or yes/no referenda, citizens are given the time and space to think, and choose wisely.

There is another benefit of mini-publics, this time for the evidence movement: they can help democratise the potentially elitist worlds of research, data and evaluation. We cover this below.

We also look at two additional benefits of mini-publics – how they can create more representative evidence of public opinion, and, secondly, how they can help research create more social impact.

Addressing the democratic deficit in the evidence movement

Evidence can be detached from people. It can be top-down and elitist.²⁹ Social scientists have spent decades pioneering more participatory and equitable approaches, but very little has entered into the evidence-informed policy arena. Research is still too often something done on people, rather than with them.

This point was made by an angry heckler at a debate in the run up to the Brexit. When the academic Professor Anand Menon asked the audience to contemplate a post-Brexit plunge in the UK's economy, the response yelled by one individual was: *"That's your bloody GDP. Not ours!"*³⁰

Such a gap between the public and economics is why organisations like the Royal Society for the Arts (RSA) set up a Citizen's Economic Council. In health, the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, one of the UK's What Works Centres, uses a mini-public to bring the public into their decision-making (**Box 2 below**).

Meaningful dialogue with the public can go a long way to connecting evidence with citizens' concerns, priorities and good ideas. The UK government's Sciencewise programme has shown the public's capacity to contribute to controversial science and tech issues, like the disposal of radioactive waste and the future of Britain's energy supply. Sciencewise has run over 50 public dialogues to inform policy-making, and made all their outcomes and impacts on policy available online.³¹ They've also tried out new methods. For example, their 'Sounding Board' trial project used a digital tool to engage groups of eight to 12 citizens in real-time, online discussion.

Box 2: Capturing public values in health and care guidance

NICE's Citizens Council is a unique example of an established and semi-permanent mini public, integrated into a decision-making body. It was established in 2002 by the UK's National Institute for Health and Care Excellence - an independent government body that provides guidance for professionals in health and medicine, public health and social care.

The Citizens Council of 30 members meets once a year for 2-3 days. The Council was set up to ensure that the perspective of the public is included in the processes it uses to develop clinical guidance. It explicitly excludes anybody already in health, such as those employed by the NHS, or patient advocacy groups.

Working on the premise that 'science is not enough', the Council aims to ensure that healthcare reflects the social values of the public.³² The Council's meetings and reports focus specifically on issues where social value judgments must be made, and the moral and ethical issues that NICE should take into account in its guidance and methodology. Its conclusions are incorporated into NICE's Social Value Judgements document.³³ This contains a series of underlying principles on NICE's ethical and legal obligations, such as the first principle that 'NICE should not recommend an intervention... if there is no evidence, or not enough evidence, on which to make a clear decision'.

Other evidence institutions could do more to listen to the public - not just their immediate professional groups. And avoid bog-standard public consultation techniques (**see Box 4 below**), like poorly attended town hall meetings, or un-read 'community newsletters'. What Works Scotland have tried out some new ways of involving the public in social policy decision-making, using a Citizens' Jury for police-community engagement (**see Box 3 below**).

Box 3: Citizens' Jury on bonfires in Peterhead

In Peterhead, North East Scotland, safety concerns over a November 5th bonfire caused tensions between local citizens and services. The celebrations were a long-standing community tradition but police, fire services and the council were worried about the fire getting out of control. What Works Scotland (WWS), helped by the police, identified the bonfire as an opportunity to trial a Citizens' Jury as part of their work on community engagement. They aimed to use a jury to foster more constructive relations and help develop 'local solutions to local problems'.³⁴ Recent legislation in Scotland has emphasised participation, like the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 - as has the ten year policing strategy 'Policing 2026' - so the mini public aimed to put this principle in to practice.³⁵

Nick Bland, then a Co-Director at WWS and now a research lead at Scottish government, has emphasised how important it was for a third - and neutral - party to be running the mini-public. They worked to convince the community they had no stake in the outcome and established a Stewarding Group that brought together representatives from the police, council, fire services and the bonfire organisers.

The mini-public was designed to fit the local context. For example, members of the public themselves were asked to define the boundaries of the community the bonfire served, by sketching out lines on a map. A random sample taken from

this area was stratified for gender, representation across age and socio-economic groups, and different opinions on the bonfire.

At the Jury, two of the bonfire organisers, one teenager and one adult in their 30s, spoke alongside representatives from the police, fire services and the local council. Some jurors did their own research for the deliberations, scoping and photographing alternative sites for the bonfire and talking to lawyers about the rights and duties of land ownership. The Jury recommended keeping the bonfire in the same location but making a number of changes to process and organisation - recognising both the tradition of the bonfire and the need for safety improvements. The majority of their recommendations were taken on board, although with only weeks to go to the event local services didn't involve the community in planning.

In interviews after the forum, the police reported that the jury provided a much more measured approach to community engagement than the consultation methods they usually used. At follow up events they also reported improved community relations, and more constructive conversations. For the local community, this was a chance to participate as active citizens on an issue of local and personal importance - Nick Bland hopes this is an example of a new kind of dialogue between local services and a community.

Creating stronger evidence on public opinion

Mini-publics can act as evidence in themselves - a way of finding out what an informed public thinks (see Box 4 below). As a method, this could be a real advantage over survey research, which may only provide a snapshot of uninformed opinion by members of the public, who may know little about an issue, or may not even have thought about it.³⁶

Box 4: Advantages of mini-publics over other methods of public engagement

Oliver Escobar and Stephen Elstub have outlined four ways that mini-publics avoid some typical pitfalls of other public engagement processes:

1. Self-selection and lack of representativeness

Mainstream public participation processes tend to attract self-selected participants of certain socio-demographic characteristics, who are interested in the topic, and struggle to reach a cross-section of the population. Lack of inclusion and diversity provides a poor foundation for just and effective public deliberation.

2. Poor quality of interaction and communication

In mini-publics, expert process design and facilitation are instrumental to avoid the usual problems of many public meetings and forums: dominant voices, silenced views, confrontational dynamics, lack of thinking time (reflex responses), shallow exchanges, rehearsed monologues, pre-packaged arguments, lack of opportunities to learn about diverse views, and so on (see Escobar 2011).

3. Need for division of labour

Not everyone can participate in everything all the time. Mini-publics can function as proxies for the broader public, and citizens can use them as points of reference for their deliberations. Good examples of this are the recent Citizens' Initiative Review model in Oregon and California, where citizens examine new proposed legislation and distil the pros and cons into a booklet that goes to every household prior to a ballot.

4. Boosting democracy and other public goods

Mini-publics can also contribute to the development of a range of other democratic goods such as encouraging longer term levels of civic engagement; developing the capacity (self-efficacy) of communities to learn, deliberate and decide on complex issues; and providing an opportunity for citizens to learn and consider evidence on complex public policy problems.

Extract from Oliver Escobar and Stephen Elstub (2017) *Forms of Mini Publics*³⁷

Understanding what users want from research

Mini-public methods can help potential beneficiaries decide research priorities. For example, patients can set medical research agendas (see **Box 5 below**). Rather than academics or evaluators doing what they think best, they listen to the people who will ultimately benefit from their research. For patients, human dignity, or speedier post-operative recovery, may be more desirable than ground-breaking medical drugs. Many of the mini-public organisers we spoke to commented on the value citizen forums have for experts: they learn new things from the public and come to see their research in a different light. The National Council for School System Evaluation (CNESCO) in France runs Consensus Conferences to understand the demand for their evaluations in the sector. *"A key principle [in the choice of topics] is that there is no point in conducting an evaluation that the sector isn't awaiting"*, according to the CNESCO communications manager Thibaut Coudroy (see **Case study 7**).

Although members of the CNESCO Consensus Conference were not randomly chosen members of the public, they used rigorous techniques to engage wider audiences. Participants were recruited from Le café pédagogique, an online network for educational professionals. A stratified sample of candidates was taken – of teachers, heads, inspectors, civil servants, parents and others - to make sure that different types of professionals and parents were included. The jurists were checked to make sure they had no strong preconceptions, and were open minded.

Box 5: Asking patients, carers and professionals to decide what to research – the James Lind Alliance

The James Lind Alliance (JLA) involves patients, carers and clinicians in setting priorities for health research. They come together to share their frustrations in the gaps in our knowledge, and suggest ways to fill those gaps. Vested interests like pharmaceutical companies are excluded from voting on research priorities. So too are academics – unless they are frontline clinicians. They have worked in UK, Canada, Germany and Netherlands.

JLA have a step-by-step methodology set out clearly in their Guidebook. They identify clinical uncertainties – that is, areas on which there is no reliable systematic review evidence, or

where there is good evidence that shows that uncertainty exists. The JLA not only suggests areas of research, it also suggests how research findings can be made more practical in ways that are needed day-to-day by patients and health professionals, such through communication plans tailored to service users and carers.

The rigour and transparency of the decision-making is similar to a mini-public. It does however have one crucial difference: it doesn't involve the general public, but people with a close interest in health research.³⁸

3

What is the best way of presenting evidence in a mini-public?

"The lesson is clear: do not be misled by expert bravado or by an expert's own sense of how he or she is doing. Evidence is a much better guide than an impressive self-presentation."

Wiser; Getting Beyond Groupthink to Make Groups Smarter, Cass Sunstein and Reid Hastie (2014)

One of the great advantages of mini-publics is that they allow enough time for the public to get to grips with the evidence. Participants read summaries of the latest science, quiz world-leading experts, or even do a crash-course in how to read an academic paper (**See Annex C on types of evidence given and presented to mini-publics**).

The advantage here is that you don't have to distort the evidence into snappy sound-bites. Of course, you don't want to push the patience of jurors with information overload, but you can avoid the dangers of over-simplification: what's cognitively easy may be the worst way to present evidence because it misses the crucial nuance of the issue. Complexity is often necessary, and mini-publics can provide that forum to engage with it. The 160 randomly selected members of the Citizen Assembly in British Columbia spent many weekends doing a Democracy 101 on the pros and cons of different electoral systems. Even two to three days of a smaller Citizens' Jury may be more valuable than much mass media - like the 1.7 seconds people spend on average on each piece of content on Facebook News Feeds.³⁹

Nevertheless, mini-publics need to raise their game. There is now a large body of evidence on how to successfully communicate research and statistics (see the systematic review on the Science of Using Science⁴⁰). Many mini-publics rely on a few single experts.⁴¹ But experts can be biased and partial. They may have pet approaches to research or science.

At the NHS Citizen Jury (**see Case study 6**), most of the experts who presented at the jury were people who'd chosen the topic in the first place. They were too close to the subject, and not impartial.

Some of the expert bias may be accidental: there are over 150 cognitive and social biases that could sway any small group, like a mini-public – including their guest experts.⁴² For instance, confirmation bias means that jurors may only process what they want to hear; statistics can be framed in a way that is more likely to impact on jurors. The leading US scholar of mini-publics James Fishkin, and the originator of the Deliberative Polling method, asks that no presentations be given by experts, so that *"arguments are considered sincerely on their merits, not how they are made or who is making them."*⁴³

There are different ways of avoiding expert bias – for example, DemocracyCo in Australia use a stakeholder reference group to put together a list of experts they think the deliberative forum should hear from. The stakeholder panels are designed to be diverse – so when each stakeholder chooses a speaker with views that reflect their own, a long list of the best thinkers, researchers or professionals in the field is produced, covering the breadth of debate on the issue. DemocracyCo then colour code this list according to the biases of experts chosen, and ask the mini-public participants to 'choose a rainbow' of speakers to hear from. Experts can also be closely managed.

In a Deliberative Poll on the divisive issue of segregated Catholic and Protestant Schools in Northern Ireland (**see Case study 1**), speakers were given limited time to respond to questions. The moderators could cut them off. Experts were not allowed to use rhetoric and persuasion to 'bring people to their side', only to answer the questions. Other organisers told us of the need to manage the order of speakers – making sure you end on a balanced note, for example, or let experts with different biases go head-to-head, so points of disagreement are made plain.⁴⁴

Another cognitive bias is plain old fashioned exhaustion – or 'cognitive overload'. This might easily arise in a jury pushed for time, spending many hours weighing up the pros and cons of crunchy ethical and technical issues. Some jurors on 'NHS Citizen' (**see Case study 6**) complained that they had too much information to process over two days. They were given no pre-briefings as the organisers wanted the jurors to come fresh to the mini-public. But without this homework, there was too much to take on board.⁴⁵

However, there is debate in the mini-publics literature on the value of sending evidence to participants in advance. In James Fishkin's work on Deliberative Polls, learning is divided in to two parts, one 'imbalanced' learning period at home and one 'balanced' learning period at the deliberative event.

Trained, neutral facilitators can have a crucial role in presenting information. The 2017 Connected Health Cities jury on health data in the North of England used facilitators to mitigate bias and help citizens construct their own interpretations of findings.

Even if the research material is written down, it can be skewed. Literature reviews can cherry pick papers that conveniently fit the conclusions of the authors. That is why systematic reviews – transparent, exhaustive studies of all the available research findings (**see Box 6**) – should be used by mini-publics. In the words of the author and campaigner Ben Goldacre, systematic reviews are valuable because:

"Instead of just mooching through the research literature, consciously or unconsciously picking out papers here and there that support [our] pre-existing beliefs, [we] take a scientific, systematic approach to the very process of looking for scientific evidence, ensuring that [our] evidence is as complete and representative as possible of all the research that has ever been done."⁴⁶

Box 6: A brief history of systematic reviews

"Systematic methods for appraising and collating evidence have only been developed over the last forty years. Critical appraisal and synthesis of research findings in a systematic manner first emerged in 1975 under the term 'meta-analysis.'" The phrase was coined by Glass who conducted syntheses in the areas of psychotherapy and school class size (for example, Glass and Smith 1979).

Although these early syntheses were conducted in the fields of social policy, systematic research synthesis grew most rapidly in the fields of medicine and health. Archie Cochrane's seminal text *Effectiveness and efficiency* (1972) urged health practitioners to practice 'evidence-based medicine'. In 1992 the Cochrane Collaboration was formed to support effectiveness reviews in healthcare and manage the knowledge generated.

A sister organisation, the Campbell Collaboration, was later formed to support reviews in wider areas of public and social policy. Despite the success of these umbrella organizations they represent only a minority of all systematic reviews undertaken.

The development of systematic methods to answer findings from other forms of research, not just questions of impact, has been slower. More recent developments have taken place in 'meta ethnography' (Noblitt and Hare 1988), mixed methods reviews and reviews addressing other fields such as management, conservation, international development, software engineering and economics.'

Extract from: David Gough, Sandy Oliver and James Thomas (2013) *Learning From Research: Systematic Reviews for Informing Policy Decisions*, Alliance for Useful Evidence. Available at: <https://www.alliance4usefulevidence.org/publication/learning-from-research>

The Citizens' Jury in Southern Australia on pandemics like SARS or Avian flu was exemplary in providing short two-page summaries based on reviews of research. They also created scenarios based on projections of pandemics to aid deliberations (see Box 7) and didn't skim over areas of uncertainty. As co-organiser Wendy Rogers described it: *"where evidence was contentious the forum was informed about the nature of the controversy, the range of views in the peer-reviewed literature and the strength of available evidence"*.⁴⁷ All the information provided was peer-reviewed by an 'Oversight Committee' of academics and government officials.

Box 7: Using communication techniques to bring the evidence alive

The Australian Deliberative Forum on pandemic planning used simulations of scenarios to help humanise a potential outbreak of a major disease (see **Case study 2**). Participants had to examine questions like when to forcibly quarantine and isolate people from their families. Scenarios were constructed using thorough reviews, statistical modelling and qualitative findings from focus groups, and helped anchor abstract problems in everyday situations. The participants also received a ten minute crash-course in how ethical reasoning works.

In Finland, participants at a Citizens' Jury on ageing were shown a video of a very elderly woman living with Alzheimer's in a local care home (**Case study 4**). This video was from one person who was too disabled to join the jury in the Ostrobothnia region of Western Finland. It *"opened the eyes of many to what their lives would be quite soon, so that changed the nature of the discussion"*, according to jury's expert lead, Harri Raisio from the University of Vaasa. In Finland, they also discussed the importance of national values. Juries need to make decisions based on ethics and cultural value, not just abstract science.

The RSA Citizens' Economic Council was part of a two year programme making the case for more democratic economic debate in the

face of eroding public trust. At the heart of their strategy was a Citizens' Economic Council (CEC) – a standing mini-public of 54 members, who deliberated for a total of five days. The RSA worked closely with the Bank of England to influence their programme of public engagement. The CEC aimed to 'build citizens' capacity and confidence in talking about the economy' using different deliberation methods.⁴⁸ This included activities to break down the evidence and encourage debate. The 'Economic Jargon Buster', asked participants to call out terminology that was confusing or unclear in order to create a co-produced jargon-buster. The 'My Economy Map' allowed participants to draw their own economies, and 'Where's My Chair?', an activity led by Professor Özlem Onaran from the University of Greenwich, aimed to generate discussion on resource distribution and allocation, while key economic concepts were explained.

At a patient and citizens' panel on Arthritis, held in Germany in 2011 to discuss GAMBA (Gene Activated Matrix for Bone and Cartilage Regeneration), organisers aimed to 'empower' citizens in the topic. Tactics included making participants 'ambassadors' who adopted an issue to pursue on behalf of the panel and presented their results on the third day, alongside the experts.⁴⁹

Many reviews are already freely available from organisations like the Campbell and Cochrane Collaborations. Some of UK What Works Centres, like the Education Endowment Foundation and What Works for Crime Reduction, provide user-friendly toolkits that visualise large bodies of international research.⁵⁰



Another problem with experts in mini-publics is that they can struggle to pitch their presentation at the right-level. Participants are not experts in science, social science and statistics. And researchers usually aren't experts in communication. Expert witnesses say that it is hard to navigate a middle ground: citizens want more in-depth analysis, but don't always understand the jargon or methodology of the experts who go that deep.⁵¹ Some simple training may be needed. The 2015 French Consensus Conference on teaching and learning in Paris held two preparatory meetings with the jury so that they could learn how to read a research paper.⁵² There were even discussions with the jurists on randomised controlled trials and non-experimental research.⁵³

Allowing jurists to select expert witnesses can boost their engagement with evidence. In one case, a 2007 Citizens' Jury on land use in the Netherlands, participants requested that government officials be brought in to create a more 'neutral' expert panel. It was found that "*interactions with the witnesses had enlarged their knowledge*", when those witnesses were selected by the participating citizens.⁵⁴ We believe a wise approach would be to allow a mix of presentation methods – drawing on face-to-face meetings with experts and facilitators; and reading written reviews of bodies of research. Information should be tailored and targeted at the audience, and uncertainty carefully communicated.

Box 8: The best way of presenting evidence in a mini-public

- Understand evidence needs: research what the public needs to know, and tailor information to your audience.
- Use rigorous evidence synthesis techniques like rapid evidence assessments or systematic reviews to gather and summarise evidence for participants.
- Avoid oversimplification; communicate uncertainty honestly, and carefully.
- Communicate accessibly: look at existing evidence on how best to communicate research.⁵⁵
- Counter expert bias through oversight and moderation.
- Leave enough time for learning and for deliberation; avoid 'cognitive overload' and be realistic.
- Explore the techniques being used to help people digest evidence – some examples from our case studies in **Box 11**.
- Using a mix of presentation methods is a wise approach.

4

Conclusion: Seven lessons for a successful mini-public

Lesson one: Get close to those in power – but give citizens space

It's a balancing act. We need to blend top-down approaches from policymakers with bottom-up citizen engagement. When choosing a topic, there is a clear tension faced by mini-public organisers: if you choose the topic and scope in a bottom-up way, involving key stakeholders, you risk being disconnected from the priorities of government decision-makers. On the other hand, if you define your priorities and scope from the top down, you might increase your chances of policy impact, but risk being disconnected from the concerns of stakeholders and citizens. It's also possible that participants will be most engaged in deliberations that speak to areas of public or community relevance – see for example how jurors did their own research on making changes to a local event in **Box 3**. We recommend setting up mini-publics on topics where there is clear demand from decision-makers at the top, whilst providing stakeholders latitude in choosing the precise questions to put to the jury.

Lesson two: Formal links to policy help create impact, but there are no guarantees

Many people we interviewed were disappointed with the limited impact on policy-making they saw – although this picture isn't uniform. Involving policy decision-makers increases the chances of having an impact, as does timing the process to feed into key decisions (for more on this, see Lesson three). However, there are still no guarantees that a well-timed and well-connected mini-public will have a substantial impact on policy. Those which achieved impact involved two key factors:

- Strong institutional anchorage with, for instance, senior policy-makers sitting on the Steering Group, and Ministerial buy-in to the process. We suggest testing a 'contract' with policy-makers where they define how they will take recommendations into account. A clear example of this strong anchorage is Ireland's Citizens' Assemblies (**see Box 1**). Rooted in mandates from parliament, they led to constitutional change.
- A strong communications strategy, targeting both institutional players, and the wider public. The French Consensus Conference on preventing reoffending is a good example: as it was a politically sensitive topic, communications included evidence notes tailored to individual stakeholder groups and weekly press briefings to encourage 'evidence-informed journalism' (**see Case study 5**).

Lesson three: Timing is everything

Getting the timing right is key to ensuring a mini-public has an impact. Mini-publics often seek to influence national and local policy processes that are very time contingent. Campaigning for election, developing future legislation, and voting on a national government's budget - all these processes tend to have strict calendars. Timing can be about luck, or political awareness. The French CNESCO (see **Case study 7**) timed their Consensus Conference on numeracy education to coincide with the finalisation of the school curricula. Organisers of an Australian Citizen's Jury on pandemic planning secured government funding and buy-in, but found those links were lost after changes in the department (see **Case study 2**). The experiences of some organisers in the UK also point out that on tricky policy issues it can be important to get in there early. Julie Mellor, chair at the Young Foundation, argues that commissioning juries early in the decision-making process allows more reasoned deliberation, before political views are entrenched and debate becomes toxic.⁵⁶

However, there is a clear tension between the need to react to short political cycles and the need to dedicate sufficient time to the preparation and running of a mini-public. You need to ensure there are enough time and resources to synthesize evidence and transmit it to participants in a timely manner. Several of the cases we cover took place over six to 12 months, ensuring there was enough time to commission research and communicate it appropriately. Those mini-publics that took less than six months to run, or had insufficient resources dedicated to this work, tended to rely more on experts, or use formats that were less accessible.

A challenge we found in our case studies covering social policy is that mini-publics in this area tend to have very broad scopes (like preventing reoffending, homelessness, inclusive schooling, numeracy learning, ageing well, and adult social care). The broader the scope, the more work is involved in preparation, if you want to ensure the process is both evidence-based and truly deliberative. Make sure you have the necessary resources in place if you want to address a broad social policy issue.

Lesson four: Don't rely on experts alone, use reviews of evidence that you can trust

Mini-publics can rely heavily on expert knowledge. In the cases we reviewed, where the mini-public is research-led, the academics involved are often responsible for creating briefing materials and setting up steering groups. In some UK cases we looked at, where the mini-public was funded by a policy-facing organisation, there was comparatively little resource allocated to evidence synthesis, with briefing materials put together in short time frames by experts. However, in half of our case studies, dedicated resources were committed to evidence synthesis (those on pandemic planning, homelessness, numeracy and reoffending). Where evidence was presented in a clear way, it appears to have heavily influenced the jury's recommendations.

Lesson five: Listen to the views of those with direct lived experience of the issue

Ground your deliberations in evidence, but do not side-line controversy and testimony from those with professional and lived experience. The majority of the mini-publics we found were structured around presentations from expert witnesses. In most cases, these experts hailed from the worlds of research and practice, but some also involved people directly involved in the issue. For example, the Consensus Conference on reoffending (see **Case 5**) controversially chose to include testimony from a group of prisoners, leading senior judges to leave the public hearings. These first-hand testimonies bring to life academic and policy debates. There are many strategies for ensuring that hearing from people with direct experience complements the evidence-based nature of the process:

- In organising the mini-public, think about how communities can be involved on an equal footing with experts. In the Scottish Citizens' Jury on community-police engagement, local services and the public sat together on the Steering Group (see **Box 3**).
- Start by setting out the key areas of consensus and debate in the research evidence. This helps participants understand where disagreement comes from, and what the options for approaching it are (for an example of this, see **Case 3** on homelessness).
- Ask experts to systematically refer back to the research evidence to support their argument (this was a feature of **Case 7**).
- Ensure real-world examples are framed by evidence-informed debate – don't let potentially provocative issues become sensationalised. (Great examples of this are provided by **Cases 8** on social care, and **2** on pandemic planning).
- Deliberative Polls deal with bias in a different way to some other mini-publics, by more strictly limiting the time experts can speak for and heavily structuring interactions with speakers. It's worth thinking hard about the options you have in structuring deliberation.

Lesson six: We should be learning more about the mini-publics

Few of the cases we explored had made much investment in learning from the process through a structured evaluation, although some surveyed or interviewed participants at the end of the activity. The evaluation of mini-publics is still underdeveloped. Often, there was no dedicated money in the budget for evaluation. One interviewee told us about the difficulty of tracing the impact of a deliberative poll through report citations or mentions by policy-makers (see **Case 1**); their effects can be diffuse. Without taking evaluations more seriously we risk missing valuable lessons on where mini-publics can make the biggest difference, including how they might best fit in with the institutions of representative democracy.⁵⁷ Investing more in learning could also help foster transparency and accountability.⁵⁸

Lesson seven: Quality matters

The way a mini-public is managed affects the way that citizens can participate. It also affects the evidence it generates, its legitimacy and impact. For instance, a well-chosen Steering Group ensures the process doesn't side-line certain evidence or view points; well-planned communications can help address stakeholder uncertainty and build legitimacy. Mini-publics aren't a quick fix, or another vacuous consultation exercise, they take lots of time and resources to be done effectively.⁵⁹ Sound processes and solid evidence give us the best chance of changing politicians' minds – and make the greatest contribution to democracy. We hope to see more mini-publics, and more innovation on how to run them well.

Annex A: The different types of mini-publics

According to Dr Elstub and colleagues, despite the diversity in mini-publics, it's possible to see five fundamental types:

1. The Citizens' Jury

First established in 1971 by Ned Crosby at the Jefferson Center foundation in the US, Citizens' Juries have been employed in many countries across the world including Australia, France, Ireland, Netherlands, Mali, and the UK. The usual set up is that the jury 'receive information, hear evidence, cross-examine witnesses, and then deliberate on the issue at hand'.⁶⁰ Normally, juries develop recommendations in response to questions set by sponsors, and are facilitated by an independent organisation. According to the Jefferson Center, which designed the method, a Citizens' Jury should take place over four to seven days. However, many juries are held as one-off events over two days. The small and short nature of Citizens' Juries thus makes them considerably cheaper than other types of mini-public. They can be used in very different ways however, with one UK example, the NICE Citizens Council (see Box 2), meeting for two weekends a year on an ongoing basis.

2. The Consensus Conference

Like Citizens' Juries, Consensus Conferences bring together a group of ten to 25 members of the public. Unlike Citizens' Juries, the Conferences involve a preparatory learning phase in which participants become familiar with the topic. They are involved in selecting the conference questions and the experts they'll hear from. These preparatory weekends give the public more control over the process. Another difference is that organisers usually advertise for participants who want to attend, and then a random sample – stratified to be as diverse as possible – is chosen from those who are interested.⁶¹ Like some Citizens' Juries, the main Consensus Conference event is open to public observers and the press. As the name reveals – these deliberations are about reaching agreement, and the result is the publication of a collective report.

The Consensus Conference originated in Denmark in the 1980s from the Danish Board of Technology, a quasi-independent body appointed by parliament. They have been used in healthcare reform in Finland, improving maths in French schools, and to debate GM foods in Denmark. Although the vast majority have been held in Denmark, their use has grown in countries outside Europe, including Australia, Argentina, New Zealand, Korea, Israel, Japan, Canada, and the USA. There have also been lots of changes in their format. For example, some cases we found in France didn't include participants in the preparatory weekends, and chose to bring together a 'comité de sages' – a group of 'wise people', or experts – rather than members of the public, for the final deliberations.⁶²

Box 9: Citizen Control over mini-publics

Researchers have pointed out that different types of mini-public hand citizens different levels of control.⁶³ Consensus Conferences are in theory the best on this front, as they allow citizens to choose – albeit from a pre-defined list – who they hear from, the information they need, and the issues that are most important. Deliberative Polls score the lowest here, as the public only input their questionnaire answers and can't influence what's asked of them or register opinions that don't fit in the survey. Planning Cells, Citizens' Juries and Assemblies (see Table 1 for a breakdown) can give the public reasonable amounts of control – although this will depend on how they're organised.

3. Planning Cells

Planning Cells share some similarities with Citizens' Juries, but involve a much larger number of citizens, usually working in small parallel groups in different locations. Created by Professor Peter Dienel at the University of Wuppertal in Germany in the 1970s, they are designed to be a sort of 'micro-parliament'; their aim is to develop a set of solutions to a problem faced by government or an organisation in a neutral and unbiased way. In each Planning Cell, twenty-five people from various backgrounds work together with the help of facilitators, who are usually subject matter experts, rather than independently trained moderators. Each cell deliberates, agrees some solutions to the problem, and completes a survey on their preferences. Facilitators from the different groups are responsible for drawing all of these results together in a final 'Citizen's Report'.

Planning Cells almost always involve an agreement with the commissioning organisation – a public authority for example – that they will take the recommendations in to account. This means that policy- or decision- makers need to publicly explain 'how and why recommendations were or were not followed'.⁶⁴ Other mini-publics, like some Citizens' Juries and Assemblies, have now followed this example.

In Spain in 1997, the Regional Department of Transportation commissioned 14 planning cells to deliberate the creation of a major highway through the Basque Region. The Cells helped evaluate existing plans for the highway, consider alternative routes, and identify the social and political effects of each option. Planning cells have also been held in Austria, Switzerland, and the USA. The largest one so far, held in Germany, involved 500 citizens from across the country.

In a review for the Alliance for Useful Evidence, Dr Elstub and colleagues found very few recent examples of Planning Cells being used in social policy - so they don't feature much in this report.

4. Deliberative Polls

These were designed in the 1980s by Professor James Fishkin at the Center for Deliberative Democracy, now at Stanford University in the US. A twist on conventional polling, they involve a survey of large group of people, between 130 and 500, both before and after a deliberative event. Deliberative polls are set up like experiments, so before and after results can be compared and a control group is set up – this allows researchers to compare the two surveys and understand what changes have happened in public opinion. At the moment, we don't really know if these changes happen because of deliberation, or if it's the new evidence the public engages with that makes the biggest difference.⁶⁵

Responses are always given alone and in private – unlike other mini-publics – to avoid the problems of groupthink and herding that may arise in groups. In Deliberative Polling the aim is not for the group to reach consensus; it's more a way of finding out what an informed public might think about difficult issues.

Deliberative Polls are the only kind of mini-public that aim to be statistically representative. This means they try to take a scientific sample of the population in question. So in theory at least, these Polls provide a microcosm of the wider populace. Several large-scale Deliberative Polls have been trialled. For instance, the 2009 'Europolis' deliberative poll took a sample of 4,384 citizens from all 27 countries in the European Union. 800 of these, stratified to make sure small countries were represented, were invited to a deliberative event. 348 people came together in Brussels to deliberate in 21 languages about the upcoming elections for European parliament, on topics such as illegal immigration and climate change.⁶⁶ Because Deliberative Polls involve larger numbers of people they have a stronger claim to representativeness than other smaller mini-publics, such as a Citizens' Jury.

They have been used in highly contested policy areas. In 2007 in Omagh in Northern Ireland, a poll was run on a perennially divisive issue – the almost entirely sectarian education system of Catholic and Protestant schools (see **Case 1**). The participants were significantly more supportive of some forms of shared education after deliberation. The Danes have run Deliberative Polls on joining the Euro in 2000 (the group chose to keep the Krone), and the Australians in 1999 on whether it should be a republic, not a monarchy.

The results of Deliberative Polls are often published in peer reviewed journals, along with rigorous statistical analysis. These provided detailed accounts of how opinion changes, although some follow up studies show that some of these effects may be reversed over time.⁶⁷ Deliberative Polls are often run in collaboration with TV companies, who broadcast parts of the process, aiming to share the learning of participants with the wider public.

Box 10: National TV and newspaper runs first ever deliberative poll

Often, Deliberative Polling creates dramatic, statistically significant changes in views. A first experiment in Deliberative Polling took place in 1994 with 300 people in Manchester, UK, on the issue of crime, and was broadcast by TV Channel 4. Expert evidence changed peoples' minds: participants left wanting to send fewer offenders to prison. There was still a sizeable majority who were keen to keep the death penalty and be tough on serious criminals. But on the whole, participants began the process wanting to 'hang'em high' and ended with 'hanging'em somewhat lower'.⁶⁸

5. Citizens' Assemblies

These can be one of the most effective ways to bring evidence and democracy together. Assembly Members are asked to find workable recommendations that are woven into policy-making. They are the *"newest (since 2004) and potentially the most radical and democratically robust of all the mini-public types developed to date"*,⁶⁹ according to Dr Elstub.

However, they are also the most ambitious mini-publics. An Assembly is costly and can last many months. Some examples have involved a consultation phase, in which participants gather perspectives from other members of the public. In British Columbia, the Netherlands, and Ontario, groups of randomly selected citizens spent almost a year choosing between different electoral systems. The participants had to learn about existing systems, then consult, deliberate, debate, and decide what specific institution should be adopted.⁷⁰

But the effort can be worth it. The big advantage of these assemblies is that they are hard-wired into the policy process. In the city of Gdansk in Poland, policy decisions of the 60-strong Citizen Assembly are binding – policies on topics like flood mitigation, air pollution, and the treatment of LGBT people are acted upon, and the assembly can spend city money.⁷¹ The British Columbia Assembly on electoral reform was *"legislatively charged with making a recommendation that would automatically go onto the ballot as a referendum proposal. This was an ironclad commitment from the provincial government from the start."*⁷² Governments and voters can turn down their recommendation, but they can't ignore them. Indeed, the reforms of the Canada Assemblies were rejected. It was, however, not regarded as a failure because of the quality of the deliberations – such as the serious attempts to engage in technical electoral issues, like single transferable proportional votes. In the Republic of Ireland, a Citizens' Assembly had more success: a referendum of the people of Ireland voted to fully adopt the Assembly recommendations, and the ban on abortion, a core part of the Irish Constitution, was overturned (**see Box 1**). Citizens' Assemblies probably offer the ideal model for engagement with evidence and politicians: *"It is the only method of citizen policy-making that combines all the following characteristics: a relatively large group of ordinary people, lengthy periods of learning and deliberation, and a collective decision with important political consequences for an entire political system."*⁷³

They are, however, hard to run as they need a lot of time and effort. The cost is hugely variable, but upwards of £300k, and can take several years to complete. There seems little point in running them if there isn't political buy-in from the start.

Annex B: Where to find out more

Useful Organisations

UK

The Centre for the Study of Democracy: www.westminster.ac.uk/centre-for-the-study-of-democracy

The Democratic Society: www.demsoc.org

Democracy Matters: www.democracymatters.org.uk

The RSA's Campaign for Deliberative Democracy: <https://www.thersa.org/action-and-research/rsa-projects/public-services-and-communities-folder/deliberative-democracy>

Citizen Participation Network: <https://oliversdialogue.wordpress.com>

Involve: www.involve.org.uk

The Sortition Foundation: www.sortitionfoundation.org

What Works Scotland: <http://whatworksscotland.ac.uk/topics/mini-publics>

France

Démocratie Ouverte: democratieouverte.org

CNESCO: <http://www.cnesco.fr>

Participation et Démocratie: www.participation-et-democratie.fr

Australia

The Centre for Deliberative Democracy and Global Governance: <https://www.governanceinstitute.edu.au/centres/deliberative-democracy-and-global-governance>

DemocracyCo: <http://www.democracyco.com.au>

The New Democracy Foundation: www.newdemocracy.com.au

US

Healthy Democracy: www.healthydemocracy.org

The Centre for Deliberative Democracy: cdd.stanford.edu

Canada

MASS LBP: www.masslbp.com/profile

International:

Deliberative Democracy Consortium (DDC): www.deliberative-democracy.net

International Association for Public Participation (IAP2): www.iap2.org

The National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation (NCDD): www.ncdd.org

Online

Democracy Renewal: www.democracyrenewal.edu.au

Participedia: www.participedia.xyz <https://participedia.net>

ParticipateDB: www.participatedb.com

Sciencewise: www.gov.uk/government/collections/sciencewise-public-dialogue-on-science-and-technology

Some other useful reading

Claudia Chwalisz (2017) *The People's Verdict: Adding Informed Citizen Voices to Public Decision-Making*. Policy Network, Rowman and Littlefield International, London

David Van Reybrouck (2016) *Against Elections: The Case for Democracy* Bodley Head, London

James Lind Alliance (2018) James Lind Alliance Guidance: <http://www.jla.nihr.ac.uk/jla-guidebook>

Oliver Escobar and Stephen Elstub (2017) *Forms Of Mini-Publics: An Introduction to Deliberative Innovations in Democratic Practice* newDemocracy <https://www.newdemocracy.com.au/research/research-notes/399-forms-of-mini-publics>

Peter Bryant and Jez Hall (2017) *Citizens Jury Literature Review*, Shared Future

Street J, Duszynski K, Krawczyk S, Braunack-Mayer A. *The use of citizens' juries in health policy decision-making: a systematic review*. Soc Sci Med. 2014 May;109:1-9

See the [Involve 'knowledge base'](http://www.involve.org.uk/resources/knowledge-base) for resources on different types of deliberative engagement, and resources for understanding and measuring impact: <https://www.involve.org.uk/resources/knowledge-base>

Annex C: Types and sources of evidence given and presented to mini-publics

	Document/source	Presentation
Evidence synthesis	<p>Systematic evidence review/rapid review (Cases 2, 3, 5)</p> <p>Literature review (Cases 1, 7, 8)</p> <p>Summary modules (Case 2)</p>	<p>Briefing summary (Cases 8 and 6)</p> <p>Summary of 'Lessons from Researcher' (Case 3)</p> <p>Summary modules (Case 2)</p>
Primary research	<p>Consultation of homelessness people (Case 3)</p> <p>Textual analysis of maths textbooks (Case 7)</p> <p>Analysis of government statistics (Case 7)</p> <p>Focus groups (Case 2)</p> <p>Statistical modelling of future scenarios (Case 2)</p>	<p>Presentation of consultation with homeless people (Case 3)</p> <p>Presentation of scenarios as a deliberative aid (Case 2)</p>
Futures and scenarios	<p>Scenarios on future pandemic outbreaks (Case 2)</p>	<p>Presentation of scenarios as a deliberative aid (Case 2)</p> <p>Future demographic trends and potential of new technologies (Case 4)</p> <p>'Personas' (Case 8)</p>
Expert witnesses		
Researchers	<p>Written contributions (for Cases 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 8)</p>	<p>Presentations (for Cases 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8)</p>
Professionals (civil servants, frontline professionals)	<p>Summary of stakeholder perspectives with criminal justice field stakeholders (for Case 5)</p> <p>Written contributions from professionals ahead of oral testimony on the day (for Cases 3, 5)</p> <p>NHS England prepared briefing documents for the jury (Case 7)</p>	<p>Presentations from frontline charities on the experience of homeless people in Europe (for Case 3)</p> <p>Presentations from policy-makers (Case 2)</p> <p>Presentations from professional health and care bodies (Case 8)</p>
People with lived experience		<p>People with experience of adult social care (Case 8)</p> <p>Presentations by prisoners and ex-prisoners (Case 5)</p> <p>Video of interview with elderly person (Case 4)</p>

Sources of research used for evidence reviews

The consensus conferences studied all involved the production of evidence synthesis. Most were a literature review or rapid review, although a systematic review from the Campbell Collaboration was used in the Preventing Reoffending Conference, which had the most explicit research protocol, including search terms. The Deliberative Forum on Pandemic Planning in Adelaide used rapid systematic evidence synthesis, with explicit research protocol, in addition to primary qualitative research.

These reviews tended to draw primarily on academic research published in peer-reviewed journals, though some also drew on a range of other sources, including government audit reports. We have organised the main sources of evidence for these reviews into four broad categories:

- Primary research or data analysis
- Policy analysis and evaluation
- Project and programme evaluations
- Evidence syntheses

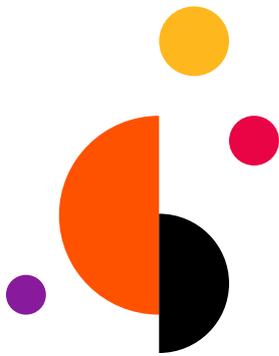
Primary research or data analysis	Analysis of national data eg. Public health agency data eg. Homelessness trends in Europe
	Qualitative studies eg. Qualitative studies relating to maths teaching and learning in France, studies on community and pandemic planning
	Experimental research eg. Studies from neuroscience and developmental psychology relating to numeracy learning
Policy analysis and evaluation	Policy research eg. Analysis of parliamentary reports on crime and reoffending eg. National actions plans, guidance and policy on pandemic influenza
	Policy evaluations eg. Analysis of inspection reports for preventing reoffending Consensus Conference
	Comparative analysis of policy and legal systems eg. Analysis of penal legislation in western countries
Project and programme evaluations	Before and after studies eg. Evaluations of homelessness services
	Quasi-experimental studies and RCTs eg. Evaluations of preventing reoffending programmes, such as the 'good lives' model
	Process evaluations eg. Process evaluations of Housing First programmes for the homelessness Consensus Conference
Evidence syntheses	Systematic reviews eg. Systematic review on drug courts conducted by the Campbell Collaboration for Preventing Reoffending Consensus Conference
	Meta-analysis eg. Meta-analysis of restorative justice approaches eg. Meta-analysis of working-memory and mathematics in primary school children
	Literature reviews eg. Literature reviews of vagrancy

Endnotes

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4. Mark Monaghan (2011, p5) *Evidence versus Politics: Exploiting research in UK drug policy making?* Policy Press, Bristol.
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7. Peter Bryant and Jez Hall (2017, p4) *Citizens Jury Literature Review*, Shared Future.
8. Stephen Elstub, Ian Johnson, Ruth Puttick & Matthew Wilkinson (2018) *Assessing the Potential of Mini-Publics to Promote Evidence Uptake in Social Policy and Practice*, Newcastle University. Available at: forthcoming.
9. Available on our website <https://www.alliance4usefulevidence.org/publication/evidence-vs-democracy/>
10. These historical precedents of 'sortition' are described in David Van Reybrouck (2016) *Against Elections: The Case for Democracy* Bodley Head, London.
11. Alliance for Useful Evidence (2016) *Using Research Evidence; A Practice Guide*, Alliance for Useful Evidence.
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18. For more on pioneering digital democracy in Europe and beyond, see 'Digital Democracy: The Tools Transforming Political Engagement' <https://www.nesta.org.uk/report/digital-democracy-the-tools-transforming-political-engagement/>
19. The Conventions' website details its recommendations and the governments response at <http://www.constitutionalconvention.ie>. Also see David Van Reybrouck (2016) *Against Elections: The Case for Democracy* Bodley Head, London.
20. The Citizens' Assembly (2018) *The Citizens' Assembly Factsheet* Available at: <https://www.citizensassembly.ie/en/About-the-Citizens-Assembly/CA-Fact-Sheet-June-2018.pdf>
21. Clodagh Harris (2018) *Bridging representative and direct democracy? Ireland's Citizens' Assemblies* Available at: <https://www.hansardsociety.org.uk/blog/bridging-representative-and-direct-democracy-irelands-citizens-assemblies>
22. This report does, however, avoid a purist single model of mini-publics. In some of our case studies, the forums have diverged quite substantially from the model of randomly selecting members of the citizens. Some Consensus Conferences in France, for instance, included groups of experts; the Irish Citizen's Assembly merged politicians with citizens. The RSA's Citizens' Economic Council combined a mini-public with range of other events and activities.
23. Stephen Elstub (2014) 'Mini publics: issues and cases' in *Deliberative Democracy: Issues and Cases*, Edinburgh University Press. For more on this, see Annex A.
24. In Annex A we also discuss Planning Cells, a kind of mini-public that originated in Germany. However, they don't feature in our report as they are mainly used in urban planning, rather than in social policy.
25. Jordan Kroll & Juliet Swann (2015) *We, the people: constitutional decision making through citizen-led deliberative processes* University of Edinburgh p43.

26. We've included the number of days each type of mini-public runs for. It's worth noting that this isn't the same as a time spend on a single issue. For example, a 20 day Citizens' Assembly might cover five topics, spending two days on each.
27. There are exceptions to this - Consensus Conferences have been run around the world in some different formats. The French cases we found brought together groups of experts to learn and deliberate together.
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31. Sciencewise are currently between websites, but you can find them in the National Archives at <https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20180103165955/http://www.sciencewise-erc.org.uk/>
32. Halsam, David (2016) *The NICE Citizens Council and the role of social value judgements*, Presentation available at <http://www.idshealth.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Citizens-Council-and-Board.pdf>
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38. James Lind Alliance (2018) *JLA Guidebook*. Available at: <http://www.jla.nihr.ac.uk/jla-guidebook/downloads/Print-JLA-guidebook-version-7-March-2018.pdf>
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41. For an overview of types of experts, see Stephen Elstub, Ian Johnson, Ruth Puttick & Matthew Wilkinson (2018) *Assessing the Potential of Mini-Publics to Promote Evidence Uptake in Social Policy and Practice*, Newcastle University. Available at: forthcoming
42. *Using Research Evidence; A Practice Guide*, Alliance for Useful Evidence, Nesta, 2016
43. See Fishkin and Luskin (2005, p285) 'Experimenting with a Democratic Ideal: Deliberative Polling and Public Opinion' *Acta Politica* (40:284-298)
44. Another approach is to bundle up a number of experts. If experts are needed to make forecasts of the future, they are much more accurate if you collate statistical groups of experts, rather than rely an individual. Many expert minds are likely to be better than a few, according to Behavioural researchers Cass Sunstein and Reid Hastie quote a comparison of 30 studies that found that groups of experts had 12.5 per cent fewer errors than individual experts – on diverse topics ranging from cattle prices, predictions of Gross National Product, and survival of patients. J Scott Armstrong 'Combining Forecasts' in *Principles of Forecasting; A Handbook for Researchers and Practitioners*. Ed. J. Scott Armstrong (New York: Springer, 2001) in *Wiser; Getting Beyond Groupthink to Make Groups Smarter*, Cass Sunstein and Reid Hastie (Harvard Business Press, 2014). p.162.
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