

CAST BRIEFING 43 - November 2025



Using citizens' assemblies to shape climate policy: A summary of current thinking for policymakers and practitioners

Key messages:

- Participating in National Citizens' Climate Assembly (NCCAs) can boost individuals' climate change knowledge and encourage sustainable behaviour.
- NCCAs to date appear to have had limited influence on climate policy. This may be because policy processes struggle to integrate recommendations from assemblies.
- Assembly outcomes are affected by the assembly's format and focus, which are often decided by policy actors.
- Views amongst publics, practitioners, academics and policymakers on the roles and purposes of NCCAs vary greatly. People who participate in NCCAs are often supportive of the process, but policymakers can be less so.
- Each NCCA is unique. The distinctiveness of each assembly affects its impact, which may unfold over a very long period of time. It is therefore difficult to predict the short- and long-term impacts of individual assemblies.
- Recent studies have argued that the design of assemblies (e.g. how evidence is formatted and communicated, membership composition) can facilitate value-based deliberations, leading to opportunities for wider learning, even questioning more deeply the policy status quo and consideration of more diverse options for climate action.



Centre for **Climate Change**
and **Social Transformations**

CAST is a global hub for understanding the crucial role that people play in fighting climate change. The CAST team is based across five UK institutions, including the University of Bath (our centre hub), the University of Manchester, the University of East Anglia and Cardiff University, as well as the charity Climate Outreach.

Introduction

This briefing is intended as a resource for policymakers and practitioners examining the role and contribution of national-level deliberative events to climate policy. For further information, read the paper: [“A review of National Citizens’ Climate Assemblies: learning from deliberative events”](#).

Over the past decade, Europe has witnessed increased interest in National Citizens’ Climate Assemblies (NCCAs) as a means to engage the public in conversations and decisions about climate change policy (see [Figure 1](#) and [Table 1](#) in Appendix). NCCAs are generally comprised of 100-150 people (usually national citizens, selected randomly according to key socio-demographic and/or other characteristics), known as assembly members. The focus of each assembly and its mode of working is often set in advance (by commissioning institutions, funders, etc.). The discussions (or ‘deliberations’) are generally facilitated and often include input from ‘experts’. The assembly members consider the topics and discussions, reaching some formal recommendations for how to address specific climate change issues and inform policy.

Advocates of NCCAs have argued that they: (a) improve the quality of climate policymaking, by providing more evidence on which to make policy decisions; and (b) offer a process more representative of diverse publics than existing governance systems, thereby potentially enabling the creation of more ambitious policy that considers a wider range of public views and meets a wider range of public needs. However, the impacts of NCCAs are still not fully understood. This briefing summarises current thinking and evidence on how NCCAs work, how they are perceived, and what they have achieved.

Methods

Researchers at the Centre for Climate Change and Social Transformations (CAST) reviewed the recent academic literature on NCCAs. Articles and reports were gathered by searching the academic databases Google Scholar and Web of Science. This returned 25 academic publications that referred specifically to NCCAs, published between 1 January 2013 and 9 December 2024. Also included were documents discussing climate assemblies, citizens’ assemblies, and deliberative events more generally, to provide greater depth and context.

Background

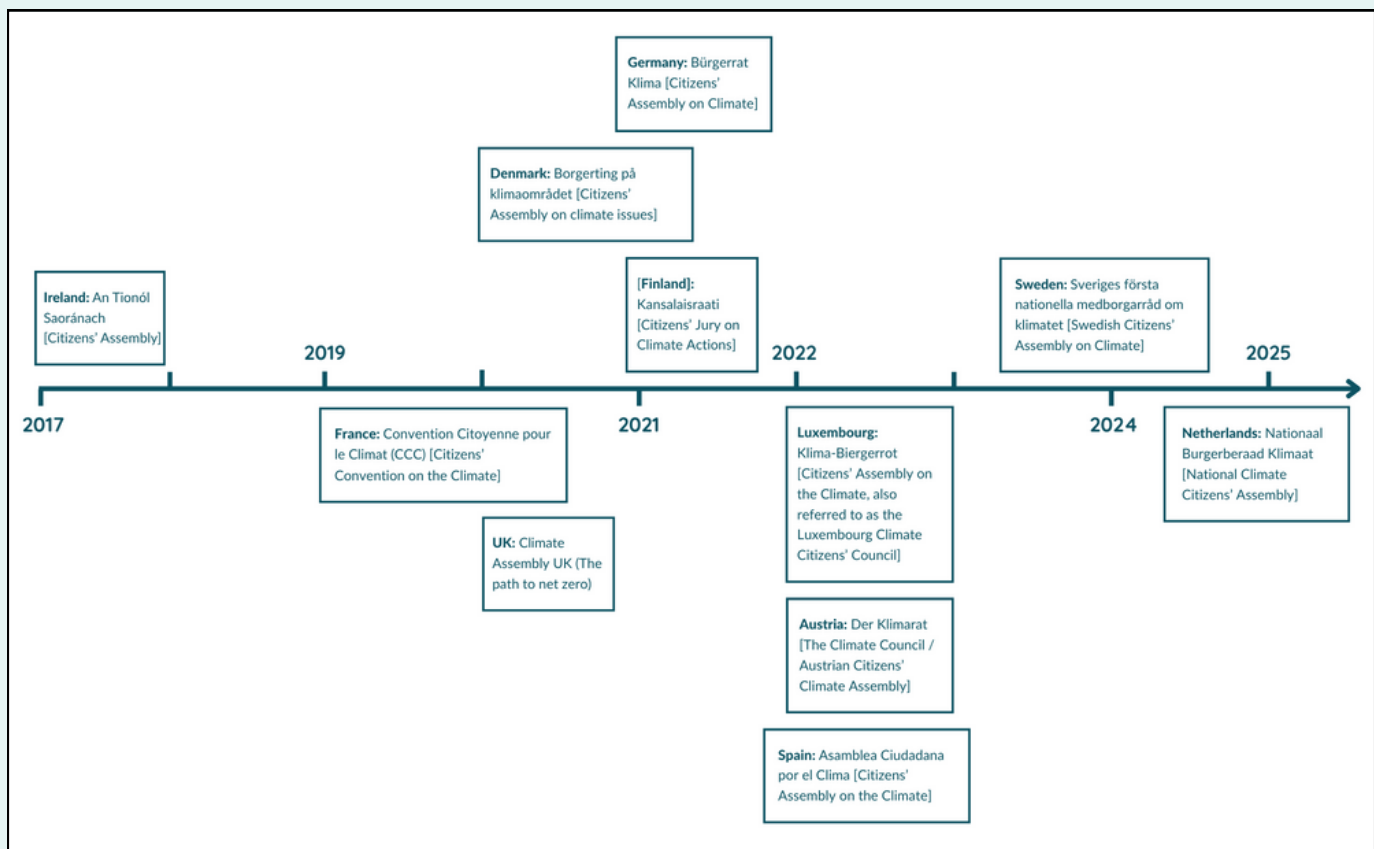


Figure 1: Timeline of National Citizens' Climate Assemblies in Europe

Findings

1) Participating in NCCAs can boost climate change knowledge and encourage sustainable behaviour

Participating in NCCAs has benefits for assembly members, including providing opportunities for acquiring information, debating and exchanging ideas, discussing views and materials shared, and deliberating potential climate solutions. Having time to think about climate change also seems to affect assembly members, who sometimes indicate that the experience of taking part makes them more concerned about climate change. As a result, many assembly members make behavioural changes and are more supportive of deliberative approaches in general.

That said, negative experiences of NCCAs can lead members to become more dubious about the policy influence of assemblies. Some scholars have also questioned the legitimacy of ‘nationally representative’ groups to propose recommendations for policy, arguing that assembly membership should also cover the perspectives of those most directly affected by issues discussed. For example, in climate assemblies, these could be younger generations, and others impacted by climate change (e.g., coastal communities experiencing sea level rise) or climate policies (e.g., workers in oil and gas industries).

2) Policymakers do not always support NCCAs

Policymakers’ and leaders’ views of assemblies are less clear cut. Politicians generally perceive assemblies to challenge existing democratic processes, thereby undermining the roles and authority of politicians. Some argue that assemblies do not currently have the democratic/representative legitimacy that democratic theorists purport they should. However, some studies have also found that when elite actors take part in assemblies, they view them more positively.

3) NCCAs’ impact on policymaking is limited

Despite normative theoretical arguments in favour of NCCAs, few NCCAs to date have had a clear and evident effect on policy making. This may be for several reasons.

First, policymaking processes are not always able to consider and integrate the suggestions from assemblies. However, alternative formats are being considered to overcome this, including reforming existing democratic structures to incorporate assemblies directly, or enabling existing processes to consider proposals emerging from such events in more depth and/or over longer periods of time. For example, in 2023, both Brussels and Milan launched permanent citizens’ assemblies on climate change.

Second, assembly organisers/sponsors may exert influence on the assembly via their choice of topics/questions to be discussed, the format of the deliberations and their response to the assembly recommendations. Scholars and assembly experts have called for more inclusive and bottom-up NCCA formats – for example, by ensuring a diverse group of individuals is included and by giving members more control over the assembly agenda and its processes.

Third, it is challenging to draw broad conclusions on NCCAs’ impact because, although NCCAs are largely designed and run based on common deliberation principles (e.g. selection of participants, key question to address, facilitation, production of recommendations), their specific features are context dependent. Each NCCA is unique. These features determine the outcomes and some impacts of the assembly. Studies have, in fact, shown that the impacts of assemblies can occur over much longer periods than may initially be expected. Evaluations should therefore specify the key criteria and time period applied in the assessment.

Conclusion

The rapidly proliferating literature on NCCAs reflects some of the hope placed in such approaches to help address the perceived inability of current democratic systems to deal effectively with climate change. Whilst NCCAs may challenge existing structures, the lack of a clear political mandate has in part reduced their short-term influence on climate decision making. More recent studies indicate that NCCAs have fostered and are spurring related innovations in deliberative decision making that are being trialled in other more localised contexts, outside Europe. However, it is too soon to assess how these more localised innovations further or differ the progress achieved by NCCAs.

Recommendations

Policymakers and practitioners interested in using NCCAs in climate decision-making should:

- Treat each assembly as a unique case defined and bounded by the context in which it is undertaken.
- Consider reviewing the impact of assemblies over longer time periods. Suitable evaluation frameworks should be applied to support such assessments.
- Exercise caution: although climate assemblies enable citizen deliberation, they are not a panacea when it comes to addressing climate policy change.
- Consider other formats for climate deliberation: bringing together a wider array of perspectives (e.g. both policymakers and publics) in the same spaces may enable greater learning and understanding. Other deliberative processes – more localised, different formats – may also result in deeper challenges to the status quo.
- Explore lessons from other assemblies which have been embedded into formalised structures of local decision making to assess their impacts and ‘successes’.

Further reading

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Appendix

Assembly	Question / framing	Time period
Ireland: An Tionól Saoránach [Citizens' Assembly]	"How can the state make Ireland a leader in addressing climate change?"	30 Sept – 5 Nov 2017 (two in-person weekends).
France: Convention Citoyenne pour le Climat (CCC) [Citizens' Convention on the Climate]	"How can France reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 40 percent (from the 1990s level) by 2030, in the spirit of social justice?"	3 Oct 2019 – 21 June 2020 (seven in-person weekends and one online due to COVID-19). Additional session in Feb 2021 to review responses by Government and Parliament.
UK: Climate Assembly UK (The path to net zero)	"How can the UK reduce greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2050?"	25 Jan – 17 Mar 2020 (three weekends in person) and April-May 2020 (three weekends online due to COVID-19).
[Finland]: Kansalaisraati [Citizens' Jury on Climate Actions]	Assess the fairness and impact of the measures to be included in the new Medium-Term Climate Change Policy Plan.	Online in April 2021.
Denmark: Borgerting på klimaområdet [Citizens' Assembly on climate issues]	To inform policy on the green transition and to feed into the annual climate action plan.	Phase 1, 24 Oct 2020 – 21 March 21, Phase 2, autumn 23 Oct – 15 Dec 2021.
Germany: Bürgerrat Klima [Citizens' Assembly on Climate]	To inform Germany's climate policy to meet the Paris Agreement aim, recognising the need for citizen involvement and views as mitigation will affect their lives.	26 April – 23 June 2021 (12 online meetings: evening and some Saturdays).
Spain: Asamblea Ciudadana por el Clima [Citizens' Assembly on the Climate]	"A safer Spain in the face of climate change - how do we do it?"	Nov 2021 – May 2022 (Six weekends plus IT prep session, all online). Final session in Madrid.
Austria: Der Klimarat [The Climate Council / Austrian Citizens' Climate Assembly]	"What do we have to do today in order to live in a climate-friendly future tomorrow?" (and how to implement this for carbon neutrality in 2040).	Jan – June 2022 (Six weekends in person, alternating between Vienna and Salzburg).
Luxembourg: Klima-Biergerrot [Citizens' Assembly on the Climate, also referred to as the Luxembourg Climate Citizens' Council]	Discussion of the country's current commitments and input new proposals to policy (i.e. inform future National Energy and Climate Plan due 2023)	Phase 1: Jan – June 2022, five in-person weekends for different topics. Extension to Phase 2 to develop recommendations more fully: July-Aug 2022 (vote in Sept 2022).

Table 1: National citizens' climate assemblies in Europe to date. Since this research was undertaken, an NCCA was also held in the Netherlands (Jan-June 2025). The Finnish citizens' jury is also included, as it is sometimes considered an NCCA.

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