Future Governance Forum

Local Trust
trusting local people

MISSION CRITICAL 04

Building a new relationship between people and the state

By Ollie Smith, Pritpal S Tamber, Hamida Ali, and Grace Wyld

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Contents

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The Future Governance Forum (FGF) is a progressive, non-partisan think tank focused on reforming the state with the ultimate goal of renewing the nation. We make politically credible recommendations for reforms that can be delivered nationally and locally, build strong networks to test new ideas, and collaborate and use our relationships with public, private and social sector leaders to innovate.

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Local Trust is a charity established in 2012 to deliver Big Local, a National Lottery Community Fund-funded programme which committed £1m each to 150 neighbourhoods across England. The £217m originally provided by The National Lottery Community Fund to support the Big Local programme is the largest single-purpose Lottery-funded endowment ever made, and the biggest ever investment by a non-state funder in place-based, resident-led change in England.

The Big Local programme was designed to reach communities that had not historically received Lottery money or public funding. The areas chosen were amongst the 20 per cent most deprived on the Index of Multiple Deprivation and also lacked civic assets. The hypothesis was that they were not receiving their fair share of funding because they lacked organisations and individuals with the knowledge, skills and contacts to raise it.

From the outset, Big Local was designed to be radically different from other funding programmes. Contrasting with conventional, top down, time-limited, project-led funding, awards were made to Big Local areas on the basis that they could be spent over time, at communities' own pace, and according to their own plans and priorities.

About the authors

Ollie Smith is an independent strategy adviser, innovator, and policymaker, as well as the Director of Daedalus Futures, a responsible AI consultancy. He was one of the founding executive team at Koa Health, which span out of Telefonica Alpha in 2020 with a €50m investment, where he was responsible for strategy and ethics. Prior to Koa Health he was Director of Strategy and Innovation at Guy's and St Thomas' Charity, responsible for investing £100m over five years in innovations in health and healthcare. He was a Senior Civil Servant in the UK Department of Health; responsible for UK Tobacco Control Policy, and UK Obesity Policy before that, writing the government's first comprehensive childhood obesity strategy. Ollie was also a Policy Adviser in the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit.

Pritpal S Tamber is a doctor who works at the intersection of evidence, control and health equity. As the former Physician Editor of TEDMED, he contends that most innovation in health fails to appreciate people's social circumstances and innate strengths. Since leaving TEDMED in 2013, he has spent time with 'community-centric' innovators to understand how they work. His observations have brought him to the importance of control, which requires individual agency and community power. He is also increasingly focused on how unfair and unjust structures create social inequities. Drawing on his earlier career as a medical editor, he now helps population health thought leaders and innovators make sense of their work and communicate it strategically, especially in high-impact, peer-reviewed journals.

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- **Jack Burkinshaw** runs an electrical company as well as several charities and community groups specialising in youth services.
- **Tony Cealy** is a theatre practitioner and cultural producer, developing policy solutions alongside people most affected by them.
- **Chrisann Jarrett** is CEO of We Belong, championing systems change and movement building.
- **Maddie Jennings** is Head of Policy and Communications at Local Trust.
- **Miriam Levin** is Director of Participatory Programmes at Demos, leading on building an upgraded democracy that works for people.
- **Anna Randle** is a practitioner in public service service reform, organisational change, strategy and leadership, and is the former CEO of Collaborate.
- **Marc Stears** is Director of the UCL Policy Lab and author of several books examining the future of democracy, including Out of the Ordinary, Demanding Democracy and, with Tom Baldwin, England.
- **Sue Tibballs** is a consultant and convenor of the Charity Reform Group (CRG) and former CEO of the Sheila McKechnie Foundation (SMK).
- **Clare Wightman** is CEO of Grapevine Coventry and Warwickshire.
- **Anthony Zacharzewski** is President and Co-Founder of Demsoc.

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Finally, with thanks to everyone who took part in the research, sharing their time and expertise: Mohammed Afridi, Cllr Fran Belbin, Dan Boyden, Sarah Castell, Jess Cordingly, Chris Dabbs, Julie Fox, Jackson Fraser-Hague, Nick Gardham, Owen Garling, Alison Goldsworthy, Gillian Goode, Jonathan Heller, Jayne Humm, Eva Johnen, Simon Kaye, Michael Kenny, Matt Leach, Michael Little, Hywel Lloyd, Sarah Lyall, Iain MacRichie, Rosie McLeod, Monica Needs, David Robinson, Rachel Rowney, Katy Rubin, Dr Darren Sharpe, Indraneel Sircar, Caroline Slocock, Hugh Smith, Tilly Steward, Nicole Sykes, Amanda Tattersall and Mike Wilson.

Introduction: a new relationship between people and the state

The government's ambition for a decade of national renewal is focused on five core missions: to kickstart economic growth; to make Britain a clean energy superpower; to build an NHS fit for the future; to make Britain's streets safer; and to break down barriers to opportunity. This mission-driven approach is not just public sector targets with a new name; it represents a wholesale change in how government approaches governing.

Missions require governments to lead with purpose and govern in partnership, as laid out in the first of our series on mission-driven government, *Mission Critical 01: Statecraft for the 21st Century*.[1] Leading with purpose means setting audacious north star goals which aim to significantly improve outcomes by overcoming complex, long-term challenges. Government efforts here include the 10 Year Health Plan for England[2] and the UK's Modern Industrial Strategy.[3] But missions cannot be achieved by the government alone, and require governments to have the humility to govern in partnership. This includes devolving power to where it can be most effectively deployed to meet the missions, a process which FGF argued for in the first of its Impactful Devolution series, *Impactful Devolution 01*[4] and which the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill[5] has begun. And missions require galvanising a cross-societal effort, including business, trade unions, and civil society, as explored in *Mission Critical 02*[6] and *Mission Critical 03*.[7] The Modern Industrial Strategy demonstrates efforts from the government to work differently with business, as does the Civil Society Covenant[8] with regards to civil society engagement.

This report, *Mission Critical 04*, expands on the *Mission Critical* series in two ways. First, it focuses on neighbourhoods as integral to the success of mission-driven government. Just as missions require the breaking down of traditional policy silos, they also demand a greater fluidity across levels of government from national to neighbourhood. Our specific focus is doubly disadvantaged neighbourhoods in England - neighbourhoods that are in the 10% poorest scoring on both the Index of Multiple Deprivation and the Community Needs Index (a measure of social infrastructure, see appendix for more), and

1 Mariana Mazzucato et al., 'Mission Critical 01: Statecraft for the 21st Century', Future Governance Forum and UCL Institute for Innovation and Public Purpose, 2024.

2 NHS England, 'Fit for the Future: 10 Year Health Plan for England', 2025.

3 Department for Business and Trade, 'The UK's Modern Industrial Strategy', 2025.

4 Ben Lucas and Lizi Hopkins, 'Impactful Devolution 01: A New Framework for Inclusive Growth and National Renewal', 2024.

5 UK Parliament, 'English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill', 2025.

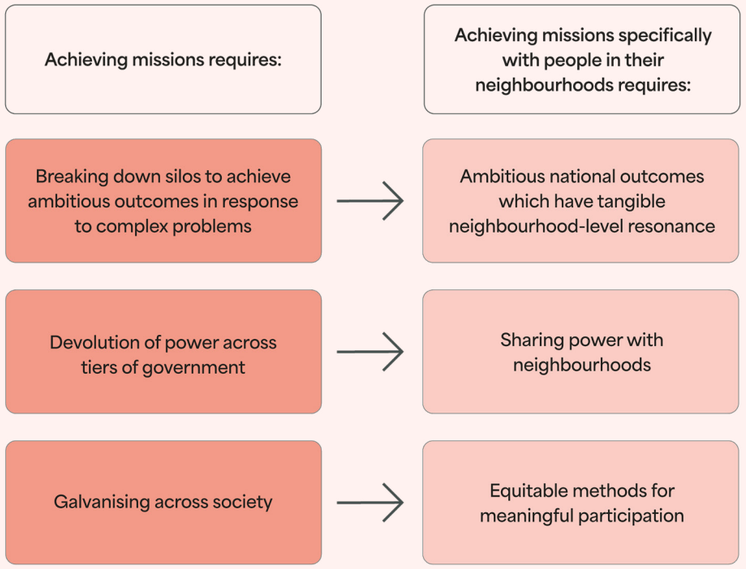
6 Ravi Puvinathan and Grace Wyld, 'Mission Critical 02: Governing in Partnership with Business and Trade Unions', Future Governance Forum, 2024.

7 Hamida Ali, Shadi Brazell, James Somerville and Grace Wyld, 'Mission Critical 03: Mission-Driven Partnerships with Civil Society Organisations', Future Governance Forum, 2025.

8 Department for Culture, Media & Sport, 'Civil Society Covenant Framework', 2024.

which represent 3.7% of the population of England. The government will not succeed in missions unless it can improve economic, social, and political benchmarks in doubly disadvantaged areas in particular. Analysis for the Independent Commission on Neighbourhoods (ICON) identified a "mission million" in England; 920,000 people who largely live in doubly disadvantaged neighbourhoods[9] and for whom urgent attention will be required to meet the government's missions.[10] The government's recently announced *Pride in Place* strategy[11] is broadly aimed at devolving decision-making to doubly disadvantaged neighbourhoods. But, to ensure the opportunities presented by such policies are meaningful to people - in terms defined by them - *how* this strategy is delivered will be critical to its impact.

Second, the report expands the idea of galvanising a cross-societal effort to encompass people as individuals citizens and/or residents (from here we will just refer to 'people'). Our thesis, grounded in the research we have conducted, is that achieving mission-driven government in doubly disadvantaged neighbourhoods requires more than money, it demands a new relationship between people and the state. Labour's neighbourhoods policy includes £5bn of investment to doubly disadvantaged neighbourhoods, but maximising the value of these resources requires holistic consideration of three of the elements of a mission-driven approach: a focus on outcomes, devolution of power, and galvanising people from across society to participate. Our view is that people will participate more in efforts to achieve missions if the achievement has direct local resonance, they have the power to make changes that they care about, and the support to effectively use that power.



9 Doubly disadvantaged areas do not fully align with the 'mission million', but there is a strong correlation.

10 Independent Commission on Neighbourhoods, 'Interim Report - Think Neighbourhoods', 2025.

11 Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government 'Pride in Place', 25 September 2025

To achieve this vision, we propose a framework for creating this new relationship that links outcomes, power and participation.

Our proposed framework is not theoretical; rather it is distilled from an analysis of empirical research and real-world practice. It is not designed as a work of political science, although it has taken inspiration from academic theories such as Danielle Allen's 'power-sharing liberalism',[12] and we would welcome engagement with this framework by academics.

Our framework can be seen as a foundation for how (through principles, opportunities and enablers), the government can begin to create a new relationship between people and the state.

This work is urgent. The state is being asked to solve a range of complex problems with higher expectations for what outcomes 'should' be delivered. The failure to meet expectations is contributing to a feeling that "nothing works anymore".[13] Mission-driven government is, in part, a recognition that the UK cannot continue with an orthodox approach and expect different results. A new approach needs to include a new relationship between people and the state, starting at the neighbourhood level, in which the state recognises that solving complex problems can only be done with greater participation, and that this is more likely when people have more power and a role in shaping the solution.

A progressive government focused on a decade of national renewal cannot afford to fail in resetting this relationship. In 2024, fewer than one in three Brits said they trusted their national government.[14] Improving trust requires missions to meaningfully improve outcomes; must devolve power to people at a neighbourhood level; and must be delivered with people via meaningful participation.

12 Danielle Allen. *Justice by Means of Democracy,* University of Chicago Press, 2023..

13 Marc Stears, and Luke Tryl. 'The Respect Agenda: New Report Shows Voters Prioritise Respect'. UCL Policy Lab, 2023.

14 Edelman Trust Institute, '2025 Edelman Trust Barometer: Trust and the crisis of grievance', 17 January 2025

Methodology

The scope of our analysis was doubly disadvantaged neighbourhoods in England: neighbourhoods that are in the 10% poorest scoring on both the Index of Multiple Deprivation and the Community Needs Index of social infrastructure.

Our approach was to undertake a mixture of desk research, interviews and roundtable discussions. The desk research included background research into topics such as civil society, community power,[15] and innovations in democracy, as well as an overview of research into recent attempts to 'regenerate' doubly disadvantaged communities, such as the New Deal for Communities, the Community First Programme, and Big Local.[16] We also reviewed over 50 documents published by academia and think tanks, which included proposals related to neighbourhood power, social infrastructure, community-led change, devolution, parish councils and rebuilding trust in society and government.

We conducted 26 interviews of practitioners, policymakers, and academics. These individual discussions were bolstered by insights gained from two roundtable meetings, one in the UK and one in partnership with the Democratic Society at the Nets4Dems Conference in Brussels in November 2024. We also visited East Belgium where citizen deliberation has been integrated into existing political institutions since 2019 (see Case Study 1 on page 18).

Finally, the research for this report benefitted from a steering group of community practitioners, academics and experts in community power, participation and democracy who guided the research, provided feedback on emerging ideas, and suggested other people and organisations to involve.

Throughout this report we will use some key terminology: power, participation, neighbourhoods, and social infrastructure. You can find definitions of these in the appendix, but briefly, what we mean by each is: power - the ability to shape narratives, set agendas and make decisions; participation - is split into five stages: informing, consulting, involving, collaborating, and empowering; neighbourhoods - equivalent to Office for National Statistics Lower Layer Super Output Areas, which typically have 1,000 to 3,000 residents; and social infrastructure - places for people to meet, organisations to represent them, and facilitation to build relationships.

Please note that this research was finalised before the publication of the Pride in Place Programme from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government on 25th September, and so it does not fully reflect the policies set out in that document.

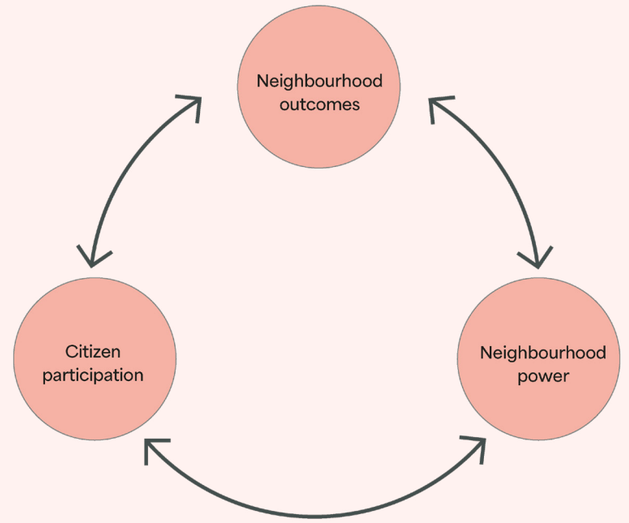
15 Pritpal S. Tamber, 'Community Power: A Primer for the UK's Labour Party', Pritpal S Tamber Ltd, August 2024.

16 These three programmes do not all map to the same geographical scope as doubly disadvantaged neighbourhoods. However, we believe that the intent and the lessons are broadly applicable to doubly disadvantaged communities.

A framework for a new relationship between people and the state

We propose a framework for creating a new relationship between people and the state, based on a reinforcing cycle of government understanding that neighbourhoods should be at the heart of delivering better outcomes, neighbourhoods both having more power and a greater ability to wield it, and greater participation by the people living in a neighbourhood.

Figure 1 - our framework for effectively delivering missions at a neighbourhood level is based on a mutually reinforcing cycle of outcomes aligned to neighbourhood priorities, neighbourhoods with power, and greater participation.



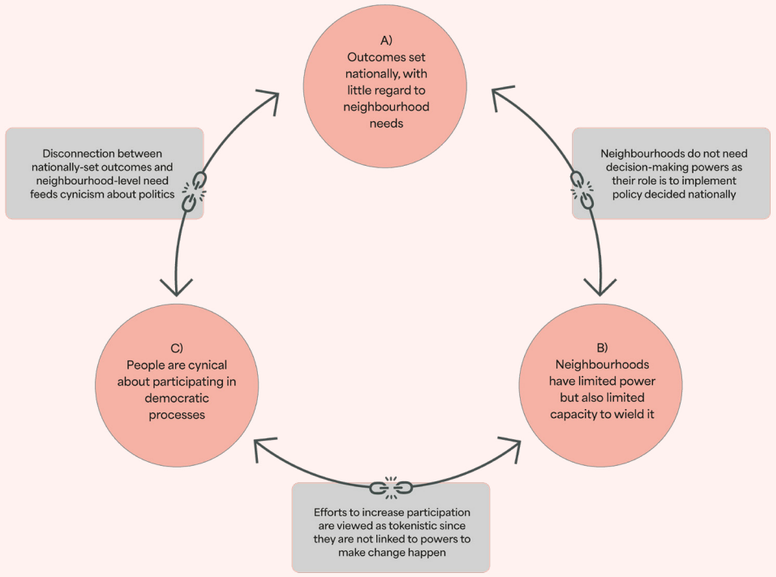
A mutually reinforcing cycle

To achieve a decade of national renewal the government must address outcomes, power, and participation all at once. We have analysed these three elements at a neighbourhood level. Focusing on doubly disadvantaged neighbourhoods in England, we have paid particular attention to: (a) the role of neighbourhoods in defining what 'good outcomes' mean; (b) the power that people can have and their collective capability to wield it; and (c) participation by people as individuals rather than representatives of organisations. Our analysis revealed weaknesses in all three. More importantly, it suggested that these weaknesses reinforce each other. For example, if a desired outcome for a neighbourhood is designed elsewhere (such as in national government) then there is limited incentive for residents to participate, nor for local leaders to demand powers that simply allow them to enact nationally-directed targets. In fact, the incentive for leaders working at a neighbourhood level is to become more effective at 'working the system' to get the outcomes that matter to their

neighbourhoods. This is an indication of a patchwork, incoherent approach to government which rewards knowledge of how to navigate the system.

Our observations about the relationship between these three elements (outcomes, power and participation) has led us to propose a framework that views them holistically because change in one cannot be accomplished without also changing the others. For example, we found that greater participation in political processes is unlikely if people don't think it will be meaningful, either because the outcomes being pursued are not ones they care enough about or because the type of participation being offered has no real power (ie is tokenistic). Figure 2 shows the relationship between the three elements as it currently exists in England, particularly in doubly disadvantaged areas.

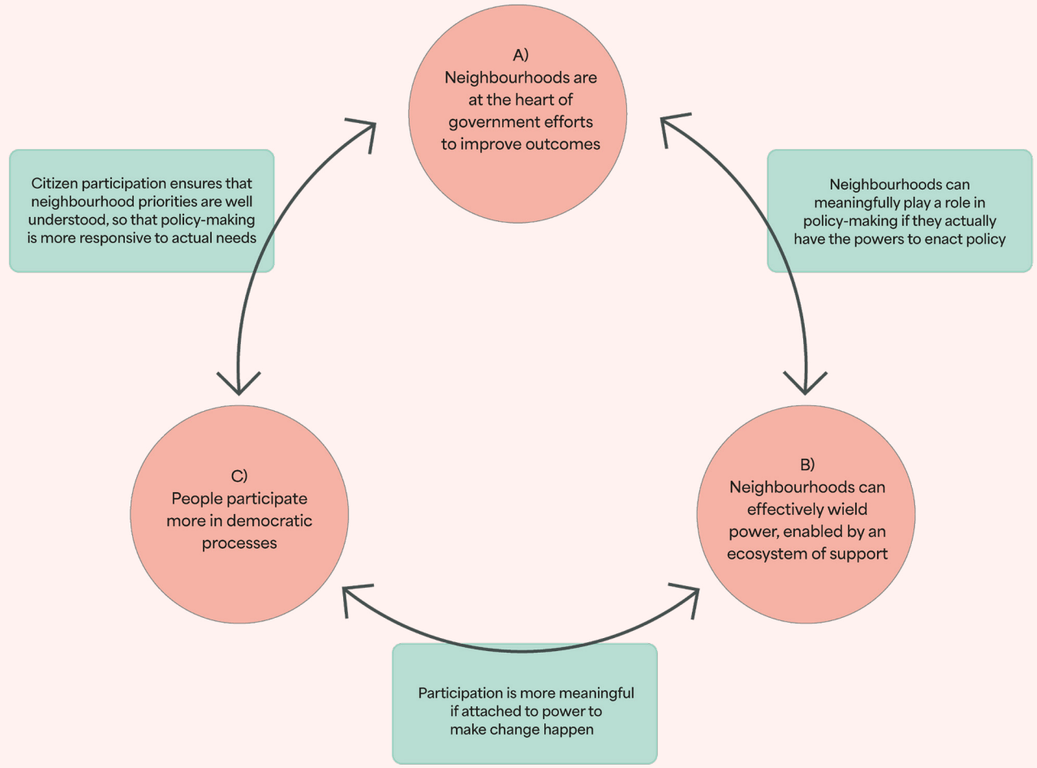
Figure 2 - A vicious cycle of outcomes set with little regard to neighbourhood needs, creating little need for neighbourhoods to have power, and so limited desire to participate in democratic processes



Breaking this vicious cycle requires reciprocity between government and people in the relationship between these three elements. For example, the government must give away power if it wants people to participate more in political processes.

Figure 3 visualises how the three elements might interact in a virtuous cycle at a neighbourhood level to create a new relationship between people and the state in which neighbourhoods are at the heart of achieving missions, have the power and capabilities to play a meaningful role, and so people are willing to participate more in the renewal of their neighbourhood.

Figure 3 - A proposal for a virtuous cycle of outcomes aligned to neighbourhood priorities, neighbourhoods with power, and greater participation.



Part 1: Outcomes at the neighbourhood level

By definition, doubly disadvantaged neighbourhoods experience worse outcomes than other neighbourhoods. This is a long-standing phenomenon, and so we start this section by taking a step back and analysing the three major programmes since 1997 that have aimed to improve neighbourhoods that were experiencing worse than average outcomes:

1. **New Deal for Communities (NDC):** Launched by the Labour Government in 1998, NDC sought to transform 39 deprived neighbourhoods in England over 10 years, investing a total of £1.8bn. Its approach involved community-led change that drew in a broad range of delivery agencies, such as the police, the NHS and the local authority. The initiative sought improvements in three place-related outcomes (crime, community, and housing) and three people-related outcomes (education, health, and worklessness).

2. **Community First:** Launched by the Coalition Government in 2011, Community First sought to leverage the 'assets' in communities – the resources, abilities and insights of local people – by encouraging them to match the funding received from government, either through cash or by volunteering. Over the course of the programme, 18,055 projects were funded through £27.3m of government grants and £94m in 'matched' funding in the form of time, expertise and resources from local residents and businesses.[17] Ward-level community panels decided which local organisations and projects should be funded.

3. **Big Local:** Launched in 2010 by the National Lottery and now in its wind-down phase, Big Local provided 150 areas in England £1m each for residents to create lasting change. As with NDC and Community First, a community-led approach was taken, with Locally Trusted Organisations identified to manage and allocate funds.

These programmes were able to achieve real positive impact: NDC saw improvements in 32 of its 36 indicators;[18] Community First delivered locally-defined needs and enhanced the skills and confidence of volunteers;[19] and an independent evaluation of Big Local found improvements in health outcomes,

17 Daniel Cameron, Lois Aspinall, Rosemary Maguire, Charlotte Crack, 'Evaluation of the Community First Neighbourhood Matched Fund,' Ipsos MORI and Nef Consulting, 2015.

18 Elaine Batty, Christina Beatty, Mike Foden, Paul Lawless, Sarah Pearson and Ian Wilson, 'The New Deal for Communities Experience: A Final Assessment, Communities and Local Government', Centre for Economic and Social Research, Sheffield Hallam University, 2010.

19 Cameron et al., 'Evaluation of the Community First Neighbourhood Matched Fund'.

reductions in burglaries, and higher levels of economic activity in Big Local areas.[20]

However, evaluations of these programmes also reveal three challenges. The first relates to duration and timing. The final evaluation of NDC concluded that the goal to regenerate neighbourhoods was probably unrealistic within the timeline (10 years) of the initiative.[21] Evaluations of Community First and Big Local noted similar concerns and added the challenge of timing; much of the funding was used to help existing organisations struggling in the economic downturn and facing public sector austerity,[22] with Big Local also affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and the impact of the UK leaving the EU.[23]

Second, programmes are found to be most effective where local communities already have the resources and capacity necessary for serving on the neighbourhood panels, as explored in part two of our findings, below. Given this evidence we therefore strongly welcome the government's recently published Pride In Place strategy, which takes a hyper-local approach to neighbourhoods policy, and adds additional funding and policy support to previous announcements, totalling £5bn in investment in doubly disadvantaged areas over the next decade.[24]

But it is the third challenge that is most relevant here: these programmes are trying to change outcomes in policy areas for which neighbourhoods inappropriately exist at the periphery of policy-making. What we mean by this is that there is a tendency for neighbourhoods to be treated largely as sites where policy is delivered, not where such policy might also be developed and decided.

Our analysis suggests that the reason for this side-lining of neighbourhoods is based on a model of policy-making that puts significant emphasis on efficiency, and so tends to favour policies that can be implemented in the same way at scale, in order to maximise efficiencies and rapid results. Moreover, the UK is the most centralised country in the G7 with the highest level of regional inequality with most cities outside the capital experiencing growth rates below the national average. All of which reflects a top-down, Whitehall-centric and paternalistic government dynamic.[25]

Yet many of the big challenges that the UK faces involve tackling complex problems by bringing together skills and resources that cut across traditional policy silos and layers of government. This can require a degree of flexibility

20 Richard Crisp, David Leather, Joe McMullan, Sarah Pearson, Ian Wilson, 'A Return to Neighbourhood Regeneration? Reassessing the Benefits of a National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal', Sheffield Hallam University, 2023.

21 Batty et al., The New Deal for Communities Experience.

22 Cameron et al., Evaluation of the Community First Neighbourhood Matched Fund.

23 Crisp et al., *A Return to Neighbourhood Regeneration?*

24 Ministry of Housing, Communities, and Local Government, 'Government announces 25 "trailblazer neighbourhoods" to receive long-term investment', 2025; Ministry of Housing, Communities, and Local Government, 'Plan for Neighbourhoods: Prospectus', 2025; Department for Culture, Media & Sport, 'Dormant Assets Scheme Strategy', 2025. Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government 'Pride in Place', 25 September 2025.

25 Ben Lucas et al., 'Impactful Devolution 01: A New Framework for Inclusive Growth and National Renewal', The Future Governance Forum, 2024.

and long-termism that works against a narrow focus on efficiency. Indeed, when such flexibility is not available policy can get stuck in a quagmire, a process that ICON's interim report articulates well.[26] Importantly, many complex problems require a profound understanding of what is happening in an individual's life and/or their neighbourhood in order to develop the right mix of actions, including what a 'good outcome' looks like for them. This requires a much more participatory approach to policy-making as well as policy delivery. The *Test, Learn and Grow* programme, led by the Cabinet Office, reflects the government's recognition of the problems with this status quo and their determination to take a mission-driven approach to create change.

Therefore, delivering outcomes in the 21st century often requires policy-making that is both integrated and participatory, which is easier to achieve at a neighbourhood level. The government has recognised this and is starting to act. The Plan for Neighbourhoods points out that no one knows the priorities of neighbourhoods better than those who live and work there.[27] However, it is perhaps best viewed as making the most of existing structures, rather than changing the underlying relationship between national and neighbourhood-level government. For example, the pre-approved list of interventions that can be implemented with Plan for Neighbourhoods funding may still lead to neighbourhoods looking up to Whitehall to seek confirmation that their plans are considered to be 'pre-approved.'

We are not suggesting that all challenges are best resolved at a local or neighbourhood level. Arguably, one of the policy areas in which neighbourhoods have most power - the built environment - is one that itself has become a barrier to a wider set of outcomes. However, our view is that this, in part, reflects the fact that neighbourhoods don't have to make such trade-offs themselves, and are merely working with the powers that they have. Yet neighbourhoods have ambitions that go beyond the built environment. One local community leader told us of his frustration at having to shoehorn ideas into a built environment framework.

Overall, achieving the missions - which are efforts to improve long-term outcomes in complex contexts - requires putting neighbourhoods at the heart of policy-making, rather than seeing it on the peripheries.

Part 2: Power at the neighbourhood level

The English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill[28] largely focuses on the regional and local tiers of government. Indeed, the merger of two-tier county and district authorities into unitary authorities has raised worries that decision-making powers will move further away from the neighbourhood level.[29] There is more reference to neighbourhood governance compared to the White Paper that preceded it. That said, it isn't definitive and simply

26 Independent Commission on Neighbourhoods, 'Interim Report - Think Neighbourhoods', 2025.

27 Ministry of Housing, Communities, and Local Government, 'Plan for Neighbourhoods: Prospectus', 2025.

28 UK Parliament, English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill, 2025.

29 Simon Kaye and India Woodward,'Local, Actually: Establishing Hyperlocal Governance in England, Reform', 2025,

refers to a duty on local authorities to ensure effective neighbourhood governance and that more detail will follow in the regulations laid following the bill's enactment. One concrete change is a 'Community 'Right to Buy', which strengthens slightly existing protections for infrastructure deemed to be 'Assets of Community Value'. In contrast, a number of organisations argued for more extensive powers for neighbourhoods, including a Community Power Act that would provide powers to shape local public services[30] and expanding the powers of parish/town councils, as well as facilitating their establishment.[31]

Informed by our background research into community power, we found that there tends to be a lack of appreciation for: (a) how power[32] at the neighbourhood level is formed; (b) how it needs to be wielded for neighbourhoods to shape - or even control - the outcomes that are important to them; and (c) what could limit it.

The focus tends to be on (c), the limits to power, particularly in the form of deficits in resources such as money, knowledge, social standing and social connection. The presence of these resources in a neighbourhood is often called 'community capacity', the assumption being that neighbourhoods with 'capacity' have power.[33] This assumption lies behind the tendency of neighbourhood renewal programmes to emphasise the amount of funding that is being invested, in the belief that more resources equals more 'capacity' equals more power. Resources are important, but in eliding resources, capacity and power, programmes miss how community power is formed and wielded.

For a neighbourhood to form power, there needs to be vehicles, such as leaders and community organisations, whether formal or informal, that represent the issues that matter to people. Establishing these effectively involves processes to surface what matters to people, finding the common issues that a critical mass of local leaders and organisations want to get behind, and bringing those leaders and organisations into a network.

Even when that's achieved - and hence power is formed - this network may not have the skills required to wield its power to change local systems, such as the local government or the local NHS. This requires specialist skills, such as advocacy, policy drafting and legal, that are typically provided by experts.[34] The combination of a network and experts is what's required for neighbourhoods to wield their power. This combination is often called an ecosystem.[35]

30 We're Right Here, 'Introducing: The Community Power Act', We're Right Here, 2022.

31 Local Trust, 'Trusting Local People: Putting Real Power in the Hands of Communities', 2023.

32 Pritpal S. Tamber, 'Community Power: A Primer for the UK's Labour Party', Pritpal S Tamber Ltd, 2024.

33 Marjory L. Givens et al., 'Power: The Most Fundamental Cause of Health Inequity?', 2018.

34 Jonathan C. Heller, Marjory L. Givens, Sheri P. Johnson, David A. Kindig, 'Keeping It Political and Powerful: Defining the Structural Determinants of Health', The Milbank Quarterly 102, no. 2, 2024: 351-66.

35 Frank Farrow, 'An Ecosystem to Build Power and Advance Health and Racial Equity – Executive Summary', 2020.

Returning to (c), once a neighbourhood is able to form and wield its power, it may still find that its power is being limited. An important nuance is that this limitation is not only due to varying resources across social hierarchies. The opaque nature of how systems operate can also limit the power of neighbourhoods,[36] both in the absence of social hierarchies and even when a neighbourhood has access to specialist skills.

This idea of how power is formed, wielded and limited was present in some of our interviews of community leaders. For instance, Grapevine, a community organisation in Coventry and Warwickshire that helps people experiencing isolation, poverty and disadvantage, has been adept for a number of years at encouraging local people to lead and at bringing different community organisations together around common issues - i.e. form community power (a). However, the ability of that community to wield its power (b) has been limited by a lack of specialist skills. For instance, some members of the community wanted to lease and restore overgrown woodland for local benefit. However, they lacked the expertise in legal processes, negotiations, and safety regulations that were required to understand and overcome the council's complex land-leasing rules and processes. In essence, the absence of (b) meant that (a) could not overcome (c).

Overall, our analysis has demonstrated the importance of a thorough understanding of how power is formed, wielded, and limited at a neighbourhood level. Addressing long-standing deficits in resources in doubly disadvantaged areas is important, but only one part of a more complex picture, one that also plays into challenges in encouraging greater participation, to which we now turn.

Part 3: Participation at the neighbourhood level

There are a range of democratic innovations that aim to support greater participation of people in political decision-making. These include: deliberative processes such as citizens' assemblies, in which a representative group of citizens participate in a number of facilitated discussions to make recommendations on an area of policy; and participatory budgeting, in which people - either a representative group, or all residents in an area – decide how to allocate a specific pot of funds. Such innovations have become more popular with policy-makers over the last decade.[37] This has been driven by some significant successes, perhaps most notably the citizens' assembly that informed the referendum on abortion rights in the Republic of Ireland.[38] The widespread use of participatory budgeting across Brazil has also been influential.[39]

36 Jennie Popay, Margaret Whitehead, Ruth Ponsford, Matt Egan and Rebecca Mead, 'Power, Control, Communities and Health Inequalities I: Theories, Concepts and Analytical Frameworks', *Health Promotion International* 36, no. 5, 2021: 1253-63.

37 OECD, 'Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions: Catching the Deliberative Wave', 2020.

38 Ramon van der Does and Vincent Jacquet, 'Small-Scale Deliberation and Mass Democracy: A Systematic Review of the Spillover Effects of Deliberative Minipublics', Political Studies 71, no. 1 2023: 218-37.

39 Brian Wampler and Benjamin Goldfrank, 'Conclusion', in The Rise, Spread, and Decline of Brazil's Participatory Budgeting, Palgrave Macmillan, 2022.

The UK has also embraced this 'participatory turn' in policy, with over 250 cases identified.[40] Indeed, there continues to be enthusiasm for this approach, with recent recommendation to embed participation as standard practice locally from the RSA,[41] and to create a citizens' panel for each mission from Demos.[42] Our review of the literature - available at Appendix B - focused on democratic innovations that aim to enhance the amount and/or quality of participation in political decision-making.

We found that:

1. There is a lack of clarity and specificity on exactly what these innovations are for: making better decisions; building trust; building civic competence or some mix of the three.

2. The evidence on the extent to which they achieve any of these goals is very mixed. The evidence is strongest that participation improves trust and knowledge amongst the people that participate, but little evidence that this spills over into the wider citizenry.

3. These innovations are more likely to be impactful when they are integrated into the wider political system, with a clear goal, an understanding of the role it plays in relation to other parts of the system, and cross-party support.

This suggests that innovations to increase participation have value, particularly in building trust amongst those who take part, but that they should be viewed within the context of wider reform, and not as a quick fix. A strategic approach should account for geographical scope, degree of consensus required on the policy to be addressed, which stage(s) of the policy development process are in scope, and all decisions should be made in light of what resources are available for the process and the follow up for participants. Most importantly, there must be a clear public narrative for the introduction of innovations in participatory democracy.

As part of the research for this report, we also visited the East Belgian parliament, which has implemented one of the most integrated and embedded models of participatory democracy anywhere in the world (see case study overleaf). Local leaders consider the model to still be nascent since, although it has been successfully embedded into the local political system, it has not yet led to any signature policy successes and so local awareness of the approach remains low.

40 https://participedia.net/search. Accessed July 21st, 2025.

41 Royal Society of Arts and Inclusive Growth Network, 'Transitions to Participatory Democracy', 2021.

42 Miriam Levin et al., 'Citizens' White Paper', Demos, 2024.

Case study 1. Ostbelgien Parliament: Integrated Citizen Participation

Ostbelgien (East Belgium) is a German speaking community of around 80,000 residents in the East of Belgium. The Ostbelgien Parliament introduced its citizens' participation model to address concerns about political uncertainty and public distrust in political processes. It drew inspiration from national-level experiences with participatory processes.[43] Ostbelgien aimed to establish a more enduring and effective mechanism than previous temporary experiments, addressing the gap between citizen interests and political decision-making. The model comprises two primary bodies:

1. **Citizens Council:**
    - Consists of 24 randomly selected citizens serving rotating terms (eight replaced annually).
    - Responsible for selecting topics from proposals by citizens and politicians.
    - Monitors the follow-up of recommendations made by Citizens Assemblies to the parliament.
2. **Citizens Assembly:**
    - Comprises approximately 30 members selected to reflect diverse demographics.
    - Engages deeply with selected topics, developing precise and actionable recommendations.
    - Run around one assembly every 12 to 18 months.

The process begins with an open call for topic proposals, after which the Citizens Council selects a suitable, specific issue within Ostbelgien's constitutional competencies. A Citizens Assembly then explores the chosen topic, supported by external expertise and organised into subgroups if necessary. Recommendations are delivered to the Parliament, which must publicly discuss and respond to them within a year, providing detailed explanations when recommendations are not adopted. A dedicated Permanent Secretariat supports the process.

43 https://www.g1000.org/en. Accessed July 21st, 2025.

The model has been most notable in ensuring meaningful citizen involvement through structured, permanent channels rather than one-off consultations. Indeed, they receive visitors from around the world, like us, to learn about the model. Experience has shown that the citizens assemblies are able to deliver detailed, thoughtful debate and produce specific, actionable recommendations. Confidence in the process has grown, including by politicians and civil servants who were initially sceptical but can now see the benefits of the diverse perspectives and innovative ideas originating from citizens.

Although the process has yet to achieve the sort of signature success of the Irish referendum on abortion rights, this speaks to the fact that much of policy-making is not glamourous, but consists in the accretion of small improvements over time. This perhaps explains low public awareness despite substantial media efforts. This may also be driven by struggles to secure more involvement by civil society organisations since individuals from such organisations can only take part as experts informing citizen assemblies. The intention here is to avoid lobbying within the deliberation process but there is an acknowledgement that this may discourage greater partnership. Notwithstanding these challenges and the need for continuing improvement, local leaders consider the model a success and a firmly established part of local political institutions.

The East Belgium case study is emblematic of the mixed picture that the evidence on participation paints. On the one hand there are eye-catching successes (e.g., the Irish referendum on abortion) and the largely positive experience of those involved in participatory processes (politicians and ordinary people), but on the other hand participatory efforts can also seem to promise more than they deliver.

This mixed picture can be resolved if participation is considered as part of the wider framework of outcomes, power, and participation. A common critique of participation methods that we heard in our research is that they are tokenistic and don't actually influence decisions. Moreover, many experts and practitioners stressed that linking citizen participation to power structures is necessary but not sufficient. The connection to outcomes that people care about is vital for them to feel that it is worth investing their time and energy in participating in political processes.

However, we also need to be realistic about what is achievable. Not everyone cares deeply about every topic, and so we should not expect everyone to participate all of the time. This does not need to be our aim though. Rather, the goal of the framework is to create a relationship between people and the state in which participation is valued by both, and incentivised and facilitated to maximise the impact that it can have, accepting that the real win will be in the slow accretion of improvements and a healthier and more trusting political culture.

Summary of our analysis

The government's approach to achieving a decade of national renewal encompasses three elements: coalescing renewal efforts around five ambitious missions that will significantly improve outcomes if achieved, devolving power where it can be most effectively wielded to achieve change, and participation in that process by all parts of society.

Yet, when it comes to doubly disadvantaged neighbourhoods, the main thrust of the government's approach is more investment. Our analysis argues that, whilst such investment is certainly needed, it is not sufficient. Neighbourhood-level outcomes, power, and participation must also be considered. We found that:

1. **Achieving the complex, long-term outcomes that the missions represent demands that neighbourhoods are at the heart of policy-making since it is at the neighbourhood level that complexity is best managed.**

2. **Empowering neighbourhoods will only happen with a broad concept of what 'power' means and a concerted effort to build the ecosystem of leaders, supporters, organisations, and methods that grows and consolidates that power to build and wield it.**

3. **People will genuinely participate when the processes for doing so are meaningful and shown to lead to genuine change.**

Importantly, the analysis found that these three elements form a holistic relationship. Changing one is enabled by making changes to the other two. Moreover, making changes across the three elements in a holistic manner requires reciprocity - the government must give away power if it wants people to participate more in political processes. For this reason, we have proposed that the three elements form a framework for achieving a new relationship between people and the state. One that we believe will maximise the impact of the neighbourhood-level investments that the government has already committed to.

The next section suggests how the government can use the framework as a basis for change, setting out principles, opportunities, and enablers.

Implementing the framework: principles, opportunities, and enablers

The government has already recognised the need to address the deficit in social infrastructure that doubly disadvantaged communities face by announcing plans to invest £5bn in doubly disadvantaged communities in the UK over the next decade.[44] It has also committed to some policies across the three core elements of our framework. However, we believe that it must go further, and we build on the argument of the Independent Commission on Neighbourhoods (ICON) that the government will only meet its missions if it '*thinks neighbourhoods*', because this is where the complexity of missions that cut across traditional policy silos can be untangled to achieve real impact.[45]

This section describes how the government can implement the framework, structured around its three parts. It sets out principles for operationalising the framework, as well as identifying opportunities to implement the framework in current policies and enablers that would facilitate seizing such opportunities.

Putting neighbourhoods at the heart of missions

Principle: Policies which seek to address complex, long-term challenges must embrace that complexity in their design. This includes involving those best placed to work across policy silos in a place, and openly navigating the natural tensions in partnerships.

Opportunity:

One opportunity to put this principle into practice is to build on the commitment set out in the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill to legislate for a statutory requirement that all Mayoral Strategic Authorities produce Local Growth Plans,[46] which FGF argued for in our report *Impactful Devolution 01: A New Framework for Inclusive Local Growth and National Renewal*.[47] This duty could be enhanced to ensure **Local Growth Plans address increased growth within doubly disadvantaged neighbourhoods.** Community economic development is a recognised method for empowering communities beyond 'consultation' and towards a sense of power and control over their local economy. A government funded programme between 2015-2017, led by Co-operatives UK undertook nationwide action research to explore

44 HM Treasury, 'Spending Review 2025', 2025; Ministry of Housing, Communities, and Local Government, 'Plan for Neighbourhoods: Prospectus', 2025; Ministry of Housing, Communities, and Local Government, 'Government announces 25 trailblazer neighbourhoods to receive long-term investment - details', 2025; Department for Culture, Media & Sport, 'Dormant Assets Scheme Strategy', 2025; Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government 'Pride in Place', 25 September 2025.

45 Independent Commission on Neighbourhoods, 'Interim Report - Think Neighbourhoods', 2025.

46 Ministry of Housing, Communities, and Local Government, 'English Devolution White Paper', 2024.

47 Ben Lucas et al., 'Impactful Devolution 01: A New Framework for Inclusive Growth and National Renewal', The Future Governance Forum, 2024.

this idea in practice.[48] That work concluded that this approach could support communities to influence both positive economic outcomes and meaningful impact in their areas.

Community economic development planning offers a community-led, ground-up approach which could support mayoral strategic authorities' role in developing Local Growth Plans, particularly within doubly disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Community economic development planning brings together residents, community organisations, businesses and local government to focus on the economy of an area through a strengths based approach. The process itself builds and strengthens social capital and seeks to improve the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of everyone.

In highlighting this opportunity, we are not suggesting that neighbourhoods will be making economic policy alone. Neighbourhoods are too small a geography for designing many economic policies, but this does not mean that they should be ignored (e.g., the bypass might be necessary for the wider area but what can be done to bring some gain to the neighbourhood that it bisects?) Mayoral Strategic Authorities will struggle to develop and hold relationships across each region at neighbourhood level to make such decisions. Community economic development plans, led by communities, could inform Local Growth Plans, ensuring a ground-up and not just a top-down approach to driving inclusive growth.

One important challenge to this opportunity is that many doubly disadvantaged neighbourhoods may lack the social capital and infrastructure to participate in community economic development. We address this in the subsequent principle but even without the introduction of a consistent layer of neighbourhood tier governance, community economic development is both achievable and would in itself help strengthen and deepen social infrastructure.

Enablers:

Neighbourhood policy has to be taken seriously within Whitehall for these opportunities to be realised. Even with the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill setting out further plans to devolve power away from the centre, Whitehall will remain the dominant policy-making force in England for the foreseeable future.

The Independent Commission on Neighbourhoods has developed several proposals to strengthen the attention given to neighbourhoods in central government policy-making. These include a Mission Delivery Prioritisation Framework, a Neighbourhood Analysis Excellence Centre, and a Commissioner for Neighbourhoods.[49] We are largely supportive of these proposals, but giving neighbourhoods more prominence in central government policy-making should neither inadvertently cement the power of central government nor negatively affect the proper relationship local government should have with its neighbourhoods. For instance, we support the idea behind the proposal for Neighbourhood Recovery Zones, in which more powers are granted to

48 Department for Communities and Local Government and Co-operatives UK, 'Community Economic Development: Lessons from Two Years' Action Research', 2017.

49 Independent Commission on Neighbourhoods, 'ICON's Neighbourhood Policy Green Paper - Delivering Neighbourhood Renewal: Proposals for Change', 2025.

neighbourhoods. However, we are not supportive of the suggestion that such zones be decided on by the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities, and Local Government, and for powers to be limited to two years. In line with our framework, we believe it will be more effective in the long-run for neighbourhoods to be granted such powers on a statutory basis.

Strengthening power at a neighbourhood level

Principle: Devolving power must be accompanied by building up the resources and capacity to wield that power, and include the scope to define and prioritise outcomes. In other words, the centre should not devolve power only for it to be constrained by centrally set targets that are non-negotiable.

Opportunity:

One opportunity to put this principle into practice is expand on the approaches taken in the Plan for Neighbourhoods[50] and the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill. The former focuses on making best use of existing power, whilst the latter does devolve power from the national level but is mostly silent on neighbourhood-level governance.[51] Yet this is an area in which there are significant disparities across England; only around a third of the population is covered by Parish Councils (also called Town, Community, Neighbourhood, or Village Councils).

Ultimately, we agree with the argument that there needs to be a consistent layer of neighbourhood governance.[52] This would likely also encourage participation in neighbourhood level politics, given the clearer link to daily life. But in the absence of a near-term legislative vehicle for such a change, we support the more incremental improvements that others have proposed, and believe that this holds promise in fulfilling the Pride in Place Strategy's commitment to implementing effective neighbourhood governance. These include making it easier to establish Parish Councils or to allow other bodies to have equivalent powers as long as they meet the same assessment criteria,[53] as well as ideas for improving their democratic credentials, given around a third of councillors are co-opted rather than elected.[54] It is important to note that people living in doubly disadvantaged neighbourhoods are likely to need support to make this a realistic prospect and may not welcome it, given lack of trust in statutory bodies. Below we describe two enablers that could form part of such support.

50 Ministry of Housing, Communities, and Local Government, 'Plan for Neighbourhoods: Prospectus', 2025.

51 Ministry of Housing, Communities, and Local Government, 'English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill', 2025.

52 Simon Kaye and India Woodward, Local, Actually: Establishing Hyperlocal Governance in England, Reform, 2025.

53 Local Trust, 'Trusting Local People', 2025.

54 Ryan Swift and Zoë Billingham, Handforth in Hindsight: The Future of Hyperlocal Governance in England, IPPR North, 2024.

Enablers:

We have identified two enablers for strengthening neighbourhood-level power, both of which focus on building and strengthening resources and capacity in neighbourhoods, and to maximise the use of the powers that they have.
The first is to **establish a network of partners to support doubly disadvantaged neighbourhoods to build their own social infrastructure**. There is already a rich ecosystem of support for neighbourhoods, but capacity constraints mean that too much of it assumes what neighbourhoods need rather than building from what people have and focussing on the issues that matter to them. The £175m investment from the Community Wealth Fund will in part address this as it will create further demand to support neighbourhood-level capacity building. However, we also believe that there is a role for the government to invest funding specifically to build up this sector so that more support is grown from within neighbourhoods rather than it being 'imported in'.

The government could fund a network of partners that, at the behest of neighbourhoods, facilitate the growth of social infrastructure and neighbourhood-level power. While the wants and needs of each neighbourhood will be unique, the partners would have four broad goals: (1) supporting people from diverse backgrounds to meet and build meaningful relationships; (2) supporting people with shared interests to form or join organisations, whether formal or informal; (3) suggesting to people which outside or specialist skills they may need to achieve their aims, and helping to connect them with it; and (4) working with people to assess the neighbourhood ecosystem and consider what might be missing. These partners would need to operate in a 'bottom-up' approach, responding to what people say while guiding them towards being able to bring about the changes that are meaningful to them. During our research we learnt that a number of organisations are working or have the potential to work in this way, such as Cambridge University's Bennett Institute, Grapevine (Coventry and Warwickshire), Pembroke House (Walworth, London), and Unlimited Potential (Greater Manchester).

The second enabler is **direct support for resident-led change**. The evidence is clear that building relationships and social capital is most effective when people pursue goals that matter to them. The pursuit of such a goal encourages people to converse with others and reach out to people they may not know. The evidence is also clear that supporting individuals to build and use their agency leads to their communities building and using their power, and vice versa – in other words there is a reinforcing loop.[55]

We heard through our interviews that residents of doubly disadvantaged neighbourhoods have big ambitions for the places that they live; the high street rejuvenated, more local jobs, the streets safer. But it's also clear that this ambition sits alongside a desire to make small changes that can make a material difference to daily life, things that only people experiencing them can truly understand the importance of, and which local authorities may not be resourced to prioritise even where they have some sense of their importance.

55 Pritpal S. Tamber, 'The Bio-Medical Evidence Linking Community Agency and Health: An Encouraging Evidence Base', Pritpal S Tamber Ltd, 2020.

A small, unrestricted grants programme should be made available for people to do whatever they think their neighbourhood needs. The size and number of the grants should be capped, the application process minimal, and there should be no reporting requirements. Residents would simply be asked to name a handful of other residents (that they are not related to) that they will be accountable to, the idea being to build a sense of community accountability and reciprocity.

We believe that the grants available need to be of a decent size to make a difference, but not too big that onerous accounting arrangements are required. We therefore suggest small grants of circa £500, which might be made available through funding that the government has already committed to.

While the improvements achieved through each grant will matter, what will also matter – and potentially be more lasting – is the sense of agency that people will experience and the relationships and networks formed through the improvement process.

Increasing participation

Principle: Only introduce participatory approaches, such as citizens assemblies, if people actually have meaningful power, the resources and capacity to use it, and the topics in scope are considered local priorities.

Opportunity:
One such opportunity to put this principle into practice is the implementation of Labour's neighbourhoods policy.

The government could require that some of the funds being invested in social infrastructure (for example, the funding for the 25 Trailblazer neighbourhoods) are provided on the condition that there is a participatory process by which local residents co-develop ideas for how to use the funds, and also choose between these ideas.

To be effective there should be few, if any, prescriptions on how such money can be spent, otherwise the process is liable to be seen as tokenistic and so discourage participation. There should also be few prescriptions on the design of the process itself. One condition that might be positive is to set a minimum level of participation, with any areas falling below this not being able to allocate the full amount of funding (the remainder would roll over to the next year). This would help incentivise greater participation.

There is good evidence from the Big Local programme that communities are able to effectively spend such funds, provided that they are supported to do so. Local Trust estimates that 30% of Big Local funding has been allocated to local capacity building and running the Big Local programme at a local level, and this is broadly consistent with what is required to run an effective participatory budgeting process.[56] Where they exist and are trusted by the community, parish councils could hold the money. Where they do not, which is typically the case in doubly disadvantaged neighbourhoods, the Big Local programme has developed a model for filling such gaps - identifying Locally Trusted

56 Local Government Association, 'Participatory budgeting', (n.d.).

Organisations.[57] Existing examples of these organisations include: housing associations, local businesses, charities, churches and GP surgeries.

Enablers:

Two enablers of greater participation have been identified.

The first enabler is to **support innovations that facilitate participatory approaches at scale.** This would help to overcome a significant barrier to participation, which is that such processes often favour those with the most resources, who are able to free up the time to attend in-person processes.

There is some evidence that digitally-facilitated processes are an effective means of enabling participation at scale. For instance Taiwan uses the Pol.is platform to underpin vTaiwan, a partnership by government, civil society, and the civic tech community to involve thousands of citizens in informing government policy. Notable successes include informing legislation on the regulation of Uber, and the right approach to tackling non-consensual intimate images. Closer to home, Change NHS used a platform powered by GoVocal to receive over a quarter of a million contributions in an online debate about the future of the NHS.

However, several experts and practitioners believe that digitally facilitated processes require more development, particularly to support the more deliberative approaches (such as citizens assemblies).[58] Therefore we recommend creating an **Innovation Challenge for Scaling Participatory Approaches.** This could be in the form of a challenge prize, in which a financial prize is awarded for the team that meets certain outcomes criteria (leaving the 'how' to the teams), potentially with capability building support provided to the teams as they seek to meet milestones towards the final desired outcomes.[59]

Notwithstanding the potential of digitally-facilitated participation, we also heard from experts that face-to-face means of participation should always remain an option. This is especially the case in doubly disadvantaged neighbourhoods, in which residents are at higher risk of digital exclusion.

The second enabler is to **publish clear guidance on the contexts in which participatory approaches are most effective.** Given the lack of clarity on the purpose and value of democratic innovations that we found in our review (for more, see appendix B), we believe that it would be helpful to establish a set of guiding principles for practitioners. This would apply not only to doubly disadvantaged neighbourhoods but the wider public sector. The guidance could be developed and transmitted by the Number 10 Partnerships Unit,[60] working with MHCLG and likely supported by external experts.

57 Local Trust, 'The Big Local Story', 2024.

58 Sammy McKinney, 'Integrating Artificial Intelligence into Citizens' Assemblies: Benefits, Concerns and Future Pathways', Journal of Deliberative Democracy, 2024.

59 Challenge Works, 'Challenge Prizes: A Practice Guide', Nesta, 2025.

60 Hamida Ali et al., *Mission Critical 03*.

Return on investment

The opportunities and enablers that we have identified in this section are only described at a high-level, with the intention of giving some colour to what moving toward a new relationship between people and the state could look like. The intention has also been to demonstrate the mutually reinforcing links at the heart of our framework. Although we believe that each of the opportunities and enablers is beneficial on its own, they will be more impactful together as they are designed to support all three elements of creating a new relationship between people and the state. If any one of outcomes, power, or participation is not supported then there is a risk that the new dynamic that the new relationship represents will not achieve sufficient momentum to be sustained.

Further work is required to build on and flesh out these ideas, including their cost. In some cases we have suggested that they be funded through the resources that the government has committed to neighbourhoods, or indeed are a means to more effectively deploy such resources. However, where additional resources might be required, these could be phased, for instance, direct support for resident-led change might be initiated in a small number of neighbourhoods before wider roll out.

Notwithstanding the tightness of the government's financial envelope, we believe that a strong case can be made for funding to support neighbourhoods to be seen as an investment. As stated previously, there is a growing evidence base that social infrastructure can support economic growth. A 2021 report by the Bennett Institute provides a good overview. For instance, cafes boost high street economies by 2-4% by attracting more people who stay longer; and every £1 in turnover by the arts and culture industry generates a further £1.24 in the wider economy.[61] Moreover, there is a ratchet effect as initial investments provide a platform that yields even greater gains. In an update to previous work, Frontier Economics estimated that every £1 spent in a neighbourhood that already has some social infrastructure in place following initial capacity building generates £3.50 worth of benefits.[62]

Clearly more research is required to support how the new relationship between people and the state can maximise the value of investments in social infrastructure, and the learning network partners will make a valuable contribution to this. But we don't need quantitative data to understand the link between social infrastructure and economic growth: walking down a high-street in a doubly disadvantaged neighbourhood and seeing a parade of boarded-up shop fronts provides the visceral enough evidence of this link.

61 Tom Kelsey and Michael Kenny, 'Townscapes: The Value of Social Infrastructure', Bennett Institute for Public Policy, 2021.

62 Frontier Economics, 'The Impact of Scaling Social Infrastructure Investment', 2025.

Conclusion

A decade of national renewal promised by the Government - delivered by their five missions - requires action at every single layer of government, and that includes neighbourhoods. Not least because neighbourhoods are where the impact of government policy and reform are felt. This is especially true of doubly disadvantaged neighbourhoods, where the gap between the missions and reality is widest.

The Government is putting important foundations in place for neighbourhood-level renewal with commitments totalling more than £5bn to invest in social infrastructure. But its mission playbook – setting audacious goals, devolving power to where it can be best used, and governing in partnership – must also be applied to doubly disadvantaged neighbourhoods so that the impact of this significant investment is maximised.

Mission-government at a neighbourhood level means: putting neighbourhoods at the heart of mission thinking, strengthening the capacity of neighbourhoods to wield power as well as devolving more of it, and leveraging both of these to encourage greater participation that will in turn reinforce neighbourhood-level outcomes and power. This represents a fundamentally new relationship between people and the state.

Moreover, of all the new relationships that mission-driven government demands, this will be the most difficult for the Government to achieve, because of the distance – literal and metaphorical – between Whitehall and doubly disadvantaged neighbourhoods. This distance is becoming more problematic given declining levels of trust in government.

Our provocation in this paper is that a decade of national renewal requires a new, re-balanced relationship between people and the state. One in which people participate in national renewal, because they have the power to make change, and because they are making Britain work again in terms that are meaningful to them.

Appendix A: Key Definitions

Neighbourhood

Analysis for ICON found that, whilst there is no consensus on defining neighbourhoods, there is evidence of the value in neighbourhoods being the right level for understanding the impact of the state on people's lives. The report refers to the wealth of literature on a "neighbourhood effect", meaning that neighbourhoods are big enough for meaningful differences in policy outcomes to be observed, yet small enough that people can build connections and relationships.[63]

We follow ICON's approach in pragmatically defining a neighbourhood as being equivalent to Office for National Statistics Lower Layer Super Output Area.[64] These areas typically have 1,000 to 3,000 residents, and also align to previous neighbourhood-level programmes in England.

Power

There are numerous definitions of power. One of the best known is from Martin Luther King Jr: "Power is the ability to achieve purpose". Steven Lukes, the political and social theorist, proposed that power has three dimensions: decision-making, agenda-setting, and shaping narratives.[65] Many grassroots activists and professional advocates have embraced this three-part definition of power due to how readily it can inform strategies and tactics.[66] Recent work has tied together where power comes from, what power is and how it can be used by communities as follows: the ability of people facing similar circumstances to develop, sustain, and grow an organized base of people who act together through democratic structures to shift public discourse, set agendas, and influence decisions to change systems.[67]

Civil Society

To describe a new relationship between the people of neighbourhoods and the state, we need to be clear about what civil society is. All too often, civil society is conflated with civil society organisations (CSOs). CSOs are an important part of civil society but there is a risk that their dominance masks other critical aspects of civil society. Recent work has described civil society as the plumbing that connects people, the conversations that occur between them, a sense of what is 'normal', and support between people.[68] CSOs can, of course, help with all of that but much of what constitutes civil society is informal and not organised.

63 Independent Commission on Neighbourhoods, 'ICON's Neighbourhood Policy Green Paper - Delivering Neighbourhood Renewal', 2025,

64 Ibid.

65 Steven Lukes, Power: A Radical View, Bloomsbury Publishing, 1974.

66 Richard Healey and Sandra Hinson, 'The Three Faces of Power', Grassroots Policy Project, 2013.

67 Anthony Iton, Sarah S. Armbruster, Sandra Fujiwara, and Jonathan Heller, Building Community Power To Dismantle Policy-Based Structural Inequity In Population Health, Health Affairs 41, no. 12, 2022: 1763-71.

68 Michael Little, 'Relational Social Policy: A Case for Public Sector Reform', Ratio, 2024.

Social Infrastructure

Social infrastructure is often reduced to the physical spaces and/or community facilities that bring people together. However, over the last few years its definition has been expanded to include things like public services, voluntary organisations and social capital.[69] Building on the work of the the Oxford Consultants for Social Inclusion (OCSI)[70] and the University of Cambridge's Bennett Institute for Public Policy,[71] we define social infrastructure as:

"Places for people to meet, formal and informal organisations that represent people's interests and bring them together, regular facilitation for diverse groups of people to build meaningful relationships, new forms of trust and feelings of reciprocity, and publicly-funded physical and digital connectedness".

Our definition covers the physical and the relational, the formal and the informal, the key process (facilitation), and the desired outcomes (relationships, trust and reciprocity) from which, we've learnt, all other outcomes emanate.

The reference to "meaningful relationships" implicitly links to the concept of social capital, the networks of trust we have with other people. This is often split into two: "bonding capital", close family and friends; and "bridging capital", connections to people not in our immediate circle of relationships. Social capital is strongly correlated with economic growth, better health, and higher educational attainment, amongst other benefits.[72]

We decided to exclude the provision of services from our definition of social infrastructure, which is present in the definition proposed by OCSI. There is no doubt that public services are a big part of social infrastructure - consider the oft-repeated story of the lonely going to see their GP just for social contact - but making public services more community-oriented and relational is beyond the scope of this work.

We also qualified the idea of connectedness, also present in the OCSI definition, by saying it needed to be publicly-funded. This is to ensure that connectedness means connecting everyone, not just those able to pay.

Participation

The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) describes participation as a five-stage spectrum: informing, consulting, involving, collaborating, and empowering.[73] Greater clarity on what kind of participation is in scope can help the state and civil society work more effectively in partnership.[74] Note that some community activists and advocates prefer to use

69 Caroline Slocock, 'Valuing Social Infrastructure', Civil Exchange, 2018.

70 OCSI, 'Introducing the Community Needs Index: Measuring Social and Cultural Factors', 2019.

71 Tom Kelsey and Michael Kenny, 'Townscapes: The Value of Social Infrastructure', Bennett Institute for Public Policy, 2021.

72 Andy Haldane and David Halpern, 'Social Capital 2025: The Hidden Wealth of Nations', Demos, 2025.

73 IAP2, 'IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation', Federation of International Association for Public Participation, 2024.

74 Rosa Gonzalez, 'The Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership', Facilitating Power, 2019

'defer to', rather than 'empower, as, they argue, 'empower' effectively ignores the numerous ways in which the power of communities is limited.[75] We are sympathetic to that argument but have used IAP2's terms for this report.

75 Rosa Gonzalez, 'The Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership', Facilitating Power, 2019

Appendix B: Rapid review of innovations in participatory democracy

1. Introduction

This appendix provides an overview of innovations in democracy that aim to enhance the amount of and / or quality of citizen participation in political decision-making. It does not address innovations focused on voting methods (e.g., quadratic voting[76]) or which directly aim to improve voter turnout at elections. Nor does it address the use of innovations to strengthen the relations citizens have with each other, without any reference to formal political decision-making. It is also worth noting that the analysis for this appendix was completed prior to that of the main report. As such it does not reflect the insights gained from the main reports analysis, notably the visit to Ostbelgien.

The rationale for this narrow scope was an initial hypothesis that the failure of efforts to foster community power to scale and endure might be overcome by these efforts being more integrated into formal political decision-making, with participatory methods considered a prime candidate.

However, whilst there is a lot of hope attached to democratic innovations to enhance citizen participation in political decision-making, this brief review of the evidence finds insufficient evidence to support such hope. Nevertheless, three broad conclusions are drawn:

1. There is a lack of clarity on exactly what these innovations are for: making better decisions; building trust; building civic competence; all of these?
2. The evidence on the extent to which they achieve any of the above goals is very mixed. The evidence is strongest that participation in democratic innovations improves trust and knowledge, but little evidence that this spills over into the wider citizenry.
3. Where the impact is strongest it arises because the innovation is integrated into the wider political system. Three lessons are drawn out here:
    a. The goal of introducing the democratic innovation must be clear:
    b. The innovation must be well-integrated into the political system, including clarity on the role it plays vis a vis other parts of the system, and formal accountability mechanisms; and
    c. Cross-party support is vital.

76 Eric Pacuit, 'Voting Methods', The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Summer 2024 ed., Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2024.

The appendix is structured as follows: section 2 describes a typology of democratic innovations; section 3 examines the different goals that are ascribed to democratic innovation; section 4 assesses the impact of such innovations; section 5 analyses three case studies that demonstrate the different ways in which democratic innovations can scale; and section 6 draws together some lessons for the UK.

Finally, even within its narrow scope, the analysis set out in this appendix does not aim to be comprehensive, but to cover enough of the evidence to provide a helpful overview of innovations in participatory democracy. It mostly draws from meta studies, articles, and reports that seek to describe the field as a whole, with some specific topics covered in more depth e.g., to support the case studies.

2. A Typology of Democratic Innovations

As described in the introduction, the focus of this analysis is on democratic innovations which aim to increase the quantum or quality of participation in democratic processes. These two lenses through which participation can be assessed also inform some of the different ways in which innovations in participatory democracy are categorised in the literature.

From the perspective of the quality of participation, Arnstein's Ladder of Participation provides the classic model here.[77] The first rung of the ladder in which actual participation happens is "informing", which is described as tokenistic.[78] The top rung is "citizen control" whose name says it all in terms of the degree of power that citizens have over a decision.[79]

Turning to considering the range of opportunities for democratic participation, one approach here is to create a typology based on the different types of decisions that citizens might participate in. The OECD goes down this route and suggests that participatory processes could be helpful for decisions about values-driven dilemmas, complex problems that require trade-offs, and long-term issues.[80] Notwithstanding that these three categories appear to overlap, the same analysis then goes on to introduce a structure that incorporates the type of input sought, such as providing an opinion vs providing a recommendation.[81]

As the OECD analysis demonstrates, trying to create a typology of democratic innovations based on just one dimension is challenging. This complexity is embraced by Elstub and Escobar[82], who assess democratic innovations across four dimensions: the type of participatory method, such as election or sortition (random but representative selection); the model of participation,

77 Sherry R. Arnstein, 'A Ladder of Citizen Participation', Journal of the American Institute of Planners 35, no. 4, 1969,: pp.216-24.

78 Arnstein, 'A Ladder Of Citizen Participation', p.217.

79 Arnstein, 'A Ladder Of Citizen Participation', p.217.

80 OECD, 'Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions: Catching the Deliberative Wave', OECD, 2020.

81 OECD, 'Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions', 35, 2020.

82 Stephen Elstub and Oliver Escobar, Defining and Typologising Democratic Innovations, in Handbook of Democratic Innovation and Governance, Edward Elgar Publishing, 2019.

such as deliberation; the mode of decision-making, including advice as well as negotiation; and the extent of power and influence, ranging from mere advice to full control. Importantly, they also analyse each of these dimensions against the level of government (local to national), the type of policy considered, and the stage of policy development.

From this multi-dimensional picture Elstub and Escobar identify four 'families' of innovations in participatory democracy.[83] They describe them as families because in each there is some variation across the dimensions assessed, but there are a few common characteristics that allow each family to be distinguished from another. These families will be used as the basic typology underpinning the analysis of democratic innovations in this appendix. The four families are:

1. Mini-publics. Characterised by the use of sortition to choose participants and deliberation as a means of decision-making.
2. Participatory budgeting. Characterised by the fact that they are used for public spending decisions.
3. Referenda and citizens initiatives. Characterised by voting as the means of participation and that decisions are made based on the aggregation of these votes.
4. Collaborative Governance. Characterised by the self-selection of the participants and a mode of decision-making based on consensus building, often through bargaining and negotiation. This family is the most diverse.

With respect to terminology. Mini-publics are often referred to as citizens' juries or citizens' assemblies, or even as just deliberative democracy. Whilst there are nuances in what these terms refer to, they all encompass processes that involve deliberation on a topic by participants chosen by sortition. As such, this appendix will refer to this family of innovations as mini-publics.

A final note on this typology is that it does not include digital innovations. Elstub and Escobar consider this category to be orthogonal to the four families, any of which can use digital technology in their implementation.[84] This paper will take the same approach. Although recent advances in AI are catalysing an increasing range of discussions on how it might enhance democracy, these will be set aside so that the analysis can focus on the fundamental innovations in participatory democracy that the four families represent.[85]

83 Elstub and Escobar, 'Defining and Typologising Democratic Innovations', p.25.

84 Ibid., p.27.

85 Hélène Landemore, 'Fostering More Inclusive Democracy with AI', IMF, 2023.

3. The Goals of Democratic Innovations

Many analyses of democratic innovations start from the perspective that democracy is in crisis.[86] Various ills are described, which are pleasingly alliterative in that they all begin with "p": polarisation, populism, post-truth, pessimism. These ills are thought to collectively be leading to a decline in trust in politicians and in the political system in general.

From this description of democratic crisis, democratic innovations are proposed as a solution. However, there is not a consistent framework for how innovations that make democracy more participatory will actually address this crisis. Nevertheless, consideration of a range of meta-studies and assessments of the field of democratic innovations suggests that three broad objectives are sought.

Firstly, better outcomes. The innovations that have a greater deliberative component (mini-publics and collaborative governance) are in particular felt to lead to better decision-making and so improved outcomes. Although, the suggestion is not that deliberation can improve all decisions; urgent decisions and decisions at a late-stage are not good candidates for deliberative processes.[87]

Secondly, greater trust in the process. Regardless of the outcome, it is important that the process to reach that outcome is regarded as fair. This is especially so given that it is highly unlikely that there will be universal agreement on any decision. For the 'losers', it is particularly important that a process is seen to be fair.[88] In terms of what 'fair' means in the context of democratic processes, Fishkin proposes three goals: equality - a decision reflects the representative will of the people, not of one group; mass participation - a decision is made based on the participation of the bulk of the electorate; and deliberation - a decision has been subject to meaningful debate before it is made.[89] He suggests that this creates a trilemma, since no single democratic process can deliver all three of these goals. For instance referenda (and elections for a legislature or executive) are strong on equality and mass participation but weak on deliberation, whereas mini-publics are strong on equality and deliberation, but weak on mass participation.[90]

Interestingly, Fishkin also refers to the need for democratic systems to avoid the "tyranny of the majority", noting that this is about the effects of democratic processes rather than their design.[91] This point is not pursued further in this

86 OECD, 'Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions'; Council of Europe, 'Report on Deliberative Democracy', Council of Europe, 2023,; Micha Germann, Katharina M. Rietig, and Levente Littvay, 'Scaling Up? Unpacking the Effect of Deliberative Mini-Publics on Legitimacy Perceptions', Political Studies, 2022,; André Bächtiger, John S. Dryzek, Jane Mansbridge, and Mark Warren, 'Deliberative Democracy: An Introduction', in The Oxford Handbook of Deliberative Democracy, Oxford University Press, 2018

87 OECD, 'Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions', 2020, p.28.

88 Germann et al., 'Scaling Up?'

89 James S. Fishkin, *When the People Speak: Deliberative Democracy and Public Consultation*, Oxford University Press, 2009, pp. 46, 60.

90 Ibid., p.46.

91 Ibid., p.60.

appendix, but it suggests that efforts to introduce democratic innovations need to be assessed within the wider literature on the legitimacy of political systems.

Thirdly, more informed citizens. As with the objective of better outcomes, innovations that focus on greater deliberation are hypothesised as being particularly helpful to increasing both knowledge of and interest in politics on the part of citizens. This is considered to be true not only of those who actually participate in a mini-public, but also the wider population who learn about the work of mini-publics either through contact with participants or through the media. Indeed, Fishkin et al. have referred to this as a "civic awakening", in which citizens become more politically engaged.[92]

The third objective also points to an underlying debate in the literature on democratic innovations about how the citizen is viewed. Traditionally, there has been a debate between those who see citizens as reasoning about the public good vs a "realist" view in which citizens are merely focused on their own self interest.[93] Bächtiger et al. have described the former as the "first generation ideal" of deliberation, and they contrast it with the "second generation ideal" which attempts to respond to the realist critique by admitting of considerations other than pure reason (such as emotion and cultural affinity) and acknowledging that there is likely to be a plurality of views in a population, not one "rational" and "correct" view.[94] This debate is only relevant to this work insofar that the second generation ideal seems to be more aligned to the conception of civil society as built on relationships between people, and that these relationships are not solely based on rational considerations.

Finally in this section, it is worth noting that, despite the sense that democracy is in crisis and the evidence that trust in it is declining, this does not necessarily mean that most people are demanding greater participation in political decision-making. For example, it is actually quite hard to find people willing to attend mini-publics as acceptance of invitations ranges from 5-10%.[95] This apparent lack of support is not necessarily incompatible with declining trust. It may simply mean that citizens have not found the opportunities for participation offered to them sufficiently compelling, in spite of a desire for change. This is an important reflection to bear in mind when reading the next section on the evidence of the impact of democratic innovations.

4. The Impact of Democratic Innovations

The first challenge in understanding the impact of democratic innovations is that there is no comprehensive database available to analyse. One of the most comprehensive is held by the OECD: it contains over 700 examples, but focuses on deliberative processes and so excludes referenda and participatory budgeting.[96] The LATINNO database does cover a wider range of democratic

92 James Fishkin et al., Can Deliberation Have Lasting Effects?, *The American Political Science Review*, Cambridge Univ Press, 2024, 11.

93 Fishkin et al., 'Can Deliberation Have Lasting Effects?'

94 Bächtiger et al., 'Deliberative Democracy', p.4.

95 Council of Europe, 'Report on Deliberative Democracy'; Christoph Niessen and Min Reuchamps, 'Institutionalising Citizen Deliberation in Parliament: The Permanent Citizens' Dialogue in the German-Speaking Community of Belgium', Parliamentary Affairs 75, no. 1, 2022: 135-53,

96 OECD, 'OECD Database of Deliberative Democracy', 2023.

innovations, and contains more than 3,700 cases.[97] However, it is limited to countries in Latin America.

In addition to the patchiness of the available data, there is also an unfortunate tendency to not report on less positive cases, which means that the available data is likely skewed to be more positive than may be the reality. Indeed, Spada and Ryan argue that this reflects, at least in part, an incomplete theorisation of what represents success of failure in democratic innovations.[98] This lends further weight to the criticism described in the previous section, about the lack of a consistent framework for the goals of innovations in participatory democracy.

In the face of this somewhat mixed context, this appendix can only provide a rather impressionistic assessment of the impact of democratic innovations. This assessment is structured against the three objectives for democratic innovations described in the previous section. It draws out differences in impact across the different families of democratic innovation where possible.

Better Outcomes

The broad view is that the impact on policy outcomes ranges from low to at best mixed. One reason for this is that it's difficult to measure the actual outcome, and perhaps even harder to define what counts as "better" (Is more but less equal economic growth better or worse than less but more equal growth?). As such, many studies instead use the percentage of recommendations accepted, or even accepted in modified form, as a proxy for impact on outcomes. For instance, the OECD's analysis of its Deliberative Democracy Database suggests that 76% of public authorities implemented over half of the recommendations made to them.[99] The LATINNO database suggests that, of the 1,189 cases in the database that aimed to produce a policy outcome (such as enact a new law), 91% successfully did so.[100] Although when assessing whether the cases in the database led to an improvement on more general democratic outcomes (such as accountability or social equality), of the 1,597 cases with sufficient evidence, only 51% produced such an outcome.[101]

A second reason for the low overall score on improving outcomes is a worry about cherry picking. That is, that politicians will tend to favour those policy outputs that are the easiest to implement and / or aligned to existing policy goals. This is much more of a worry for mini-publics and collaborative governance, within both of which there is either a negotiation to reach an outcome, or the output of the process requires a further stage before it is translated into policy. Indeed, this is not a theoretical worry. A study of 39 participatory processes in Spain (including both mini-publics and participatory budgeting) found that just under half of the proposals were either not taken forward or modified, which is on the low side in the context of the OECD work.

97 https://www.latinno.net/en/. Accessed July 21st, 2025.

98 Paolo Spada and Matt Ryan, The Failure to Examine Failures in Democratic Innovation, *PS, Political Science & Politics* (New York, USA) 50, no. 3, 2017, pp.772-78.

99 OECD, *Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions*, 105.

100 Thamy Pogrebinschi and Fátima Ávila-Acosta, 'The Impact of Democratic Innovations in Latin America', in *The Impacts of Democratic Innovations*, ECPR Press, 2023, 272.

101 Ibid, p.275.

However, more importantly, it found that in two-thirds of cases no justification was provided for the modification or ignoring of the mini-publics' proposals.[102]

Greater Trust

Once again, the evidence here is mixed. However, the spread of opinion appears to be greater. The main explanation for this is the difference between improving trust in the participants in a process vs improving trust in the wider citizenry.

With respect to fostering greater trust in participants in a process, there is a leaning towards there being a positive effect, although it should be noted that most of the reviews that address participant trust are focused on mini-publics. Several meta reviews conclude that mini-publics do have a positive impact on participant trust in politics.[103] However, this is counterbalanced by a couple of meta reviews that are more equivocal because the evidence might point in the right direction but is not statistically significant.[104]

One important nuance to highlight is that the increase in trust can vary by the type of participant. A review of mini-publics in Canada found that, whilst participants did see an increase in trust in politics during and after the mini-publics, they already had higher trust in politics than the general population, suggesting a degree of self-selection within the sortition process.[105] Whereas, a survey-based experiment using a series of hypothetical mini-publics and referenda (and so not real-world data) found that the perceived fairness of negative results (i.e., in which the theoretical participatory process concluded with a result that was against the preference of the participant) was found to have a bigger impact on those with the lowest trust in politics.[106] These two results are not necessarily in conflict but do at least suggest that, if the goal is to improve trust in politics, then this might be a relevant criterion to incorporate into the sortition process to ensure a representative spread.

Turning to the impact on trust on citizens as a whole, scholars are in general more negative. Although it should be said that this negativity is largely because most studies don't measure the impact on the wider population, likely because this is much harder to measure in a way that provides credible evidence.[107] Much of the evidence on wider impact appears to be anecdotal, albeit

102 Josè Luis Fernàndez-Martínez et al., 'The Sin of Omission? The Public Justification of Cherry-Picking', in *The Impacts of Democratic Innovations*, ECPR Press, 2023.

103 Council of Europe, 'Report on Deliberative Democracy'; Brigitte Geissel and Ank Michels, 'Conclusion. Democratic Innovations and Impact: Reflections and an Agenda for the Future', in *The Impacts of Democratic Innovations*, ECPR Press, 2023,; Shelley Boulianne, 'Building Faith in Democracy: Deliberative Events, Political Trust and Efficacy', *Political Studies* (London, England) 67, no. 1, 2019: 4–30.

104 Ramon van der Does and Vincent Jacquet, 'Small-Scale Deliberation and Mass Democracy: A Systematic Review of the Spillover Effects of Deliberative Minipublics', *Political Studies* 71, no. 1, 2023: 218–37; Marie-Isabel Theuwis et al., 'A Meta-Analysis of the Effects of Democratic Innovations on Citizens in Advanced Industrial Democracies', *ConstDelib Working Paper Series*, no. 15, 2021: 1–39.

105 Boulianne, 'Building Faith in Democracy'.

106 Germann et al., 'Scaling Up?'

107 Geissel and Michels, 'Conclusion. Democratic Innovations and Impact'.

positive.[108] The most robust evidence is survey data of public opinion about large, national level mini-publics. For the Irish Citizens' Assembly of 2016-2018 an exit poll after the referendum on amending the constitution with respect to abortion found that 66% of respondents had been aware of the Citizens' Assembly.[109] Conversely the French public was largely unaware of the Citizens' Climate Convention, but this did not stop a majority of those surveyed about it being sceptical about the process.[110] That there can be such contrasting views of two mini-publics by the general public merely strengthens the argument that more evidence is required.

Informed Citizens

The narrative of the impact of democratic innovations on making citizens more informed about politics parallels that of improving their trust in politics; there is a clear split between the impact on people who participate in processes such as mini-publics vs the impact on the general public.

Fewer meta reviews assess the impact on the knowledge and capability of participants and those that do tend to focus on mini-publics as they consider there to be insufficient evidence for the other families of democratic innovations. However, there does appear to be more consistency here that there is a positive impact on knowledge and capabilities, and even a desire to engage in more processes like mini-publics.[111]

Experimental data also backs up the tentatively positive conclusion of meta-reviews. A mini-public experiment run by Fishkin et al. demonstrated that, even months after the mini-public was held, participants had more knowledge about politics and were more likely to believe that their opinions were worth listening to than before the mini-public.[112] It is these results that led the authors to develop the idea of a "citizen awakening" that was referred to in the previous section.

As with fostering trust in politics, the evidence for improving the knowledge and capabilities of the general public is much weaker. Again, the challenge is a lack of evidence rather than there being evidence against.[113]

Cross-cutting Observations

Beyond the above analysis against the broad goals of democratic innovations, three cross-cutting observations can also be made from the evidence reviewed.

108 Council of Europe, 'Report on Deliberative Democracy', p.9.

109 OECD, *Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions*, p.109.

110 Louis Gaëtan Giraudet et al., '"Co-Construction" in Deliberative Democracy: Lessons from the French Citizens' Convention for Climate', *Humanities & Social Sciences Communications 9*, no. 1, 2022.

111 Theuwis et al., 'A Meta-Analysis of the Effects of Democratic Innovations on Citizens in Advanced Industrial Democracies', 2024.; van der Does and Jacquet, 'Small-Scale Deliberation and Mass Democracy'; Geissel and Michels, 'Conclusion. Democratic Innovations and Impact'.

112 Fishkin et al., 'Can Deliberation Have Lasting Effects?', p.11

113 Geissel and Michels, 'Conclusion. Democratic Innovations and Impact'; van der Does and Jacquet, 'Small-Scale Deliberation and Mass Democracy'.

The first observation is that there are no policy areas that stand out as empirically as particularly appropriate subjects for democratic innovations. It is true that many cases in the OECD Database relate to urban planning, transport, environment, and health. However, these policy areas are often managed at local or regional levels of government, and there are simply greater numbers of local and regional governments than there are national governments. Indeed, 84% of the cases in the OECD database are from local of regional/state government.[114] Thus, the preponderance of these policy areas as the focus of democratic innovations, at least in terms of actual practice, may just be an artefact of what powers sit at what level of government.

The second observation is that there is insufficient evidence to say much about the duration of the impacts arising from democratic innovations. There are studies that consider the longer-term impact, but "long-term" can range from a few months to a few years, definitions of success are not consistent across studies, and many lack a control group.[115] Therefore, there is insufficient consistency and robustness across what is already a small dataset to be able to say anything meaningful.

The third observation is that, notwithstanding the lack of data on the impact of democratic innovations on the population as a whole, there is also a theoretical challenge. There is no description of the mechanism by which changes in the trust and capabilities of participants in democratic innovations can spillover into non-participants.[116] This appears to be a big omission since, on the face of it, it appears highly unlikely that innovations that mostly reach a few dozen people at a time can have a population-wide impact.

One suggestion to address this omission is that political science might seek to draw on other disciplines, such as sociology and media studies, and consider three potential mechanisms: socialisation; cultivation; and contagion.[117] Another approach is to tackle the scale problem head-on and attempt to offer such innovations in participatory democracy at a much larger scale. This is part of the thinking behind the Deliberative Polls run by Fishkin.[118] Technologies such as artificial intelligence may also allow participatory democracy to happen at a larger scale.[119]

Finally, upon reading this section, one might be tempted to ask: "what explains the apparent disconnect between the excitement about democratic innovations and the paucity of strong evidence for their success?". Spada and Ryan might point to an under-theorisation of what success looks like.[120] However, this still doesn't account for the fact that, even when the Finally, upon reading this section, one might be tempted to ask: "what explains the apparent disconnect between the excitement about democratic innovations

114 OECD, 'OECD Deliberative Democracy Database', 2023.

115 van der Does and Jacquet, 'Small-Scale Deliberation and Mass Democracy', 227.

116 Geissel and Michels, 'Conclusion. Democratic Innovations and Impact'; van der Does and Jacquet, 'Small-Scale Deliberation and Mass Democracy'.

117 van der Does and Jacquet, 'Small-Scale Deliberation and Mass Democracy', 232.

118 Fishkin, *When the People Speak*.

119 Landemore, 'Fostering More Inclusive Democracy with AI'.

120 Spada & Ryan, 'The Failure to Examine Failures in Democratic Innovation'.

and the paucity of strong evidence for their success?". Spada and Ryan might point to an under-theorisation of what success looks like. However, this still doesn't account for the fact that, even when the definitions of success within the evidence are taken at face value, the overall picture is pretty mixed. A more generous explanation might be that scholars and activists tend to focus on those cases in which democratic innovations are implemented at scale, rather than just being pilots. The next section therefore addresses this question of impact at scale.

5. Scaling Democratic Innovations

The extent to which democratic innovations scale can be examined from three angles: repetition, the innovation is used repeatedly by a government body; replication, the innovation spreads across a country; and integration, the innovation forms part of a wider decision-making process. These three angles are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, for truly successful scaling of a democratic innovation, it could be argued that all three need to be present. However, in this section they will be examined separately, using a case study for each one.

Repetition - Ireland's Citizens' Assemblies

The Republic of Ireland has had three waves of using mini-publics in combination with referenda. The first wave was the 2012-14 Constitutional Convention, which addressed eight specific issues, including marriage equality and the clause in the Irish Constitution on the role of women in the home. This was followed by a second wave in the form of the 2016-2018 the Citizens' Assembly, which addressed five issues, including abortion rights and climate change. Ireland is now in its third way; from 2020 onward, it has launched assemblies that focus on one broad issue each, such as the 2020-21 assembly on gender inequality, the 2022 assembly on biodiversity loss, and an existing assembly on drug use. It is the third wave that supports the idea of this democratic innovation having become a stable part of political decision-making in Ireland.

Ireland has seen significant change arising from its mini-publics. Following the Constitutional Convention, in May 2015 Ireland voted in a referendum to legalise same-sex marriage. Similarly, following the Citizens' Assembly, in May 2018 Ireland voted to repeal the 8th Amendment of the Irish Constitution and so legalise and regulate abortions. These successes have made Ireland something of a poster-child for democratic innovation, with many scholars citing it as demonstrating what is possible and inspiring interest in other countries.[121]

Although the changes resulting from the referenda garner the headlines, it is the way that Ireland seems to be developing its own particular model that makes it a good case study for scaling democratic innovations. At the core of Ireland's approach is its linking of mini-publics with referenda.[122] The evolution of its approach to mini-publics is also suggestive of movement toward a stable

121 OECD, *Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions*; Council of Europe, 'Report on Deliberative Democracy'; Vincent Jacquet et al., *The Impacts of Democratic Innovations*, ECPR Press, 2023.

122 David M. Farrell et al., '"Systematizing" Constitutional Deliberation: The 2016-18 Citizens' Assembly in Ireland', *Irish Political Studies* (ABINGDON) 34, no. 1, 2019: 113-23.

model; the third wave of mini-publics in Ireland focus on one topic area, and now pay honoraria to encourage attendance.

However, the approach has not yet been perfected, particularly with respect to how it integrates into the wider process of political decision-making. For instance, there have been some accusations of 'cherry-picking' as governments have decided to take forward some recommendations but not others.[123] Moreover, not every referendum has seen a positive result: the referendum on the age of presidential candidates failed to pass in 2015; and most recently, in March 2024, a proposed amendment to the clause in the constitution that refers to the role of women in the home failed to pass. The fact that some referenda did not succeed is not in itself a sign of failure of course. Mini-publics aim to be representative but they can never hope to fully represent the views of citizens in a way that referenda can. Nevertheless, in the immediate post-mortem of the failed recent vote, there has been some concern that the reason for the refection was unclear wording and concern over the uncertainty that this could create.[124]

Despite some setbacks, the repeated use of democratic innovations in Ireland is impressive, but why did it come about? Two reasons stand out. The first relates to how it was initiated, which it is argued was because there was a real sense of crisis in Ireland. The financial crash of 2008 hit Ireland particularly hard and there was general feeling that the major institutional pillars of Ireland were just not working and that fundamental change was required. This created a dilemma because in Ireland constitutional change can only come about through a referendum, but having the very institutions that were being questioned choose the topics for referenda, and set the wording of the questions, seemed wholly inadequate and even perverse given the sense of crisis. Mini-publics came to be seen as the solution to this dilemma.[125]

The second reason for success is success itself. That is, the Constitutional Convention was considered sufficiently successful, with resulting constitutional change as proof, that there was openness to trying again with the Citizens' Assembly, at which point this cycle was repeated. This satisfaction encompassed both participants and politicians, of whom some of the latter represented a third of the participants in the Constitutional Convention.[126] There is less evidence that the public as a whole was and is supportive. However, there was certainly high awareness of the work of the mini-publics during the first two waves of democratic innovation, as well as significant input on some issues when calls for public input have been made.[127]

123 Kevin Cunningham et al., 'Ireland's Deliberative Mini-Publics', in The Oxford Handbook of Irish Politics, with Niamh Hardiman and David M. Farrell, Oxford Handbooks, Oxford University Press, 2021, p.640.

124 'Ireland's referendums: what went wrong, and what happens now?', The Guardian, 10 March 2024.

125 Cunningham et al., 'Ireland's Deliberative Mini-Publics', p. 629.

126 Ibid.; Farrell et al., '"Systematizing" Constitutional Deliberation'.

127 Cunningham et al., 'Ireland's Deliberative Mini-Publics'; OECD, *Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions*.

Replication - Participatory Budgeting in Brazil

Participatory Budgeting (PB) first emerged in Porto Alegre in Brazil in the late 1980s as part of the process of re-democratising the country. The model has evolved over time but the "full" version is considered to include: the direct election of participants (although some may also be assigned by local politicians and civil society leaders); a formal process for participants to prioritise and make decisions over some percentage of a (normally) local government's budget; and a strong expectation that such decisions will be enacted, even if they are not legally binding.[128]

PB has been in existence in Brazil for over 30 years, and the story is one of a precipitous rise, followed by a perceived decline. The exact picture depends on the size of the municipality assessed. For example, looking at municipalities with a population greater than 100k, the numbers using PB rose from 11 in 1989-1992, rising to a high of 112 in 2001-2004, but by 2012-2016 it was down to 60.[129] Whereas, if all municipalities are considered then the numbers using PB are still growing: from 109 in 2001-2004 to 433 in 2013-16.[130] However, these figures are thought to include versions of PB that are rather weak[131], such that even Fedozzi et al talk in terms of PB losing its political "centrality" and "prestige".[132]

This decline seems perplexing because much of the evidence suggests that PB has demonstrated real, albeit modest success in Brazil. Medium and large-N analyses broadly show that PB has delivered some redistribution of resources which in turn led to improvements in areas such as the local built environment, and it has also had an impact on supporting citizens to become more informed.[133]

A number of scholars agree that the close association of PB with the Workers' Party (PT for its name in Portuguese - Partido dos Trabahaldores), is a significant reason for both its ascent and its relative decline.[134] This is partly because, in places where PT lost power, or needed to form a coalition, PB was rowed back.[135] However, it is also the case that PT was never wholly bought into the innovation. For example, upon gaining power nationally, PT put more emphasis on more consultative approaches to citizen participation.[136] Moreover,

128 Gianpaolo Baiocchi et al., 'Assessing the Impact of Participatory Budgeting', in Bootstrapping Democracy: Transforming Local Governance and Civil Society in Brazil , Stanford University Press, 2011; Elstub and Escobar, 'Defining and Typologising Democratic Innovations'.

129 Lígia Lüchmann et al., '30 Years of Participatory Budgeting in Brazil: The Lessons Learned', *in Hope for Democracy: 30 Years of Participatory Democracy Worldwide*, by N. Dias, Faro, 2018.

130 Luciano Fedozzi et al., 'Participatory Budgeting in Brazil: Elements for a Brief Evaluation.', in *Hope for Democracy: 30 Years of Participatory Democracy Worldwide*, by N. Dias, Faro, 2018.

131 The difference in definitions likely accounts for the fact that a figure of 109 is given for the period 2001-2004, whereas a figure of 112 is given for the same period by Lüchmann, Borba, and Romão 'Hope for Democracy'.

132 Fedozzi et al., 'Hope for Democracy', 121.

133 Brian Wampler and Benjamin Goldfrank, 'Conclusion', in 'The Rise, Spread, and Decline of Brazil's Participatory Budgeting', Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 2022.

134 Wampler and Goldfrank, 'Conclusion'; Fedozzi et al., 'Hope for Democracy'; Lüchmann et al., 'Hope for Democracy'; Baiocchi et al., 'Assessing the Impact of Participatory Budgeting'.

135 Lüchmann et al., 'Hope for Democracy', p.96.

136 Wampler and Goldfrank, 'Conclusion'; Lüchmann et al., 'Hope for Democracy'; Fedozzi et al., 'Hope for Democracy'.

this wasn't just a national phenomenon: if all of the municipalities governed by PT are considered, the numbers using PB keep rising but there is a decline in the percentage of municipalities governed by PT which use PB, from a high of 47% in 1997-2000 down to 32% in 2012-2016.[137]

A second reason, and in contrast to the Irish experience, is that early success bred latter failure. Wampler and Goldfrank describe this as the "state capacity trap".[138] Many municipalities in Brazil had sufficient capability and resources to deliver small and medium scale projects. These successes then led to demands to deliver bigger projects, but these were beyond the capabilities and resources of many municipalities, leading to failure and disappointment.

A final reason for the decline can perhaps best be captured as 'stagnation'. This was the coming together of a number of trends which meant that PB was seen as less attractive. Partly this was due to the two reasons described above, but a worsening fiscal position in Brazil meant that local municipalities lost some of the freedoms upon which PB rested.[139] In addition, what has been described as an "NGOisation" of civil society organisations meant that they, just as with PT, began to favour more consultative methods of participation instead of PB.[140] This overall lessening of enthusiasm for PB coincided with, and perhaps enabled, the capture by local elites of some PB processes.[141]

The combined impact of these three trends can perhaps best be seen not in the absolute numbers of municipalities using PB, but in its longevity wherever it has been implemented. On average, in about half of municipalities PB is not maintained beyond one mayoral term.[142] Moreover, as is common with innovations in participatory democracy, the actual numbers of people who participate is not large, perhaps around 4-8% of a municipality with PB.[143]

Indeed, perhaps the initial story of success needs some tempering. Looking at the country as a whole, Brazil has over 5,600 municipalities, so even taking a loose definition of PB and using the figure of 433 for 2016, barely 8% of municipalities use this innovation.[144] It's true that the share of the population covered by PB may be higher, but it's very unlikely to reach anywhere near a majority.

Therefore, whilst PB can still be described as a successful case of replication, even if it is somewhat fallen back recently, it cannot be said to be fully integrated into the Brazilian political system. Perhaps this helps to explain why, during the huge demonstrations that occurred during 2013 and 2014 which called for significant change, those calls did not include widespread demands for further opportunities for PB.[145] The next case study addresses what integration can look like.

137 Fedozzi et al., 'Hope for Democracy', p.119.

138 Wampler and Goldfrank, 'Conclusion', p.113.

139 Wampler and Goldfrank, 'Conclusion', p.122.

140 Wampler and Goldfrank, 'Conclusion', p.115.

141 Lüchmann et al., 'Hope for Democracy', p.97.

142 Wampler and Goldfrank, 'Conclusion', p.118.

143 Wampler and Goldfrank, 'Conclusion', p.118.

144 Fedozzi et al., 'Hope for Democracy'.

145 Wampler and Goldfrank, 'Conclusion', p.115.

Integration - Ostbelgien (Eastbelgium)

Ostbelgien is a German-speaking community of nearly 80K people in the East of Belgium. It became part of Belgium as part of war reparations set out in the Treaty of Versailles, and during the post-WW2 federalisation programme in Belgium it secured significant autonomy such that it is considered one of the smallest federal entities in the world.[146] It is included as a case study in this annex because in 2019 it established a permanent mini-public - the Permanent Citizens' Council - which is fully integrated into the working of the Ostbelgien parliament.

The basic design has three parts: the Permanent Citizens' Council; Citizens' Assemblies; and the Permanent Secretary. The Permanent Citizens' Council consists of 24 members chosen by sortition for 18 months, with a third changing every 6 months, and it has two main roles. The first is to establish up to three Citizens' Assemblies every year to consider topics within the competence of the Ostbelgien parliament. Topics for the Citizens' Assemblies can only be chosen with at least a two-thirds majority of the Permanent Council. The Permanent Council's second role is to oversee how the parliament and ministers respond to the recommendations of the Citizens' Assemblies. Members of these assemblies are also chosen by sortition, and there can be between 25-50 members. As part of their work, each assembly is required to discuss their final recommendations, each of which requires an 80% majority of the assembly, with the relevant parliamentary committee on at least three occasions. The whole process is supported by a Permanent Secretary and secretariat, as well as an annual budget allocated by the parliament.

There is not yet any evidence (at least not published in English) on the impact of the Ostbelgien model, but it is still instructive to examine how it came to be established. An important element that scholars stress is the uniqueness of Ostbelgien: its small size; its close-knit identity; and the fact that most politicians are part-time, and so have other jobs.[147] However, this analysis will not dwell on the unique elements of Ostbelgien, and instead focus on aspects that might be found in other regions or countries.
Firstly, there was a sense of crisis, or at least impending crisis, amongst the politicians in Ostbelgien. This might seem odd for a polity in which the politicians appear to be much closer to citizens than is often the case in other areas. However, in interviews, the politicians of Ostbelgien argued that this closeness allowed them to notice the impendent crisis and act to prevent it.[148]

Secondly, and relatedly, local leaders were able to take this sense of impending crisis and turn it into a concrete vision for Ostbelgien that was broadly supported. It was not just about building trust in the abstract, but reinforcing the local German-speaking identity, and even helping to put Ostbelgien on the map with a world first democratic innovation.[149]

146 Hadrien Macq and Vincent Jacquet, 'Institutionalising Participatory and Deliberative Procedures: The Origins of the First Permanent Citizens' Assembly', *European Journal of Political Research*, Hoboken, 62, no. 1, 2023.

147 Macq and Jacquet, 'Institutionalising Participatory and Deliberative Procedures'; Niessen and Reuchamps, 'Institutionalising Citizen Deliberation in Parliament'.

148 Macq and Jacquet, 'Institutionalising Participatory and Deliberative Procedures', p.166.

149 Macq and Jacquet, 'Institutionalising Participatory and Deliberative Procedures', p.167.

Thirdly, as with the Irish case study, Ostbelgien was building on some earlier success. Not only was politics already reasonably participatory, helped by the fact that politicians work part-time, but they had successfully piloted a mini-public focused on childhood policy in 2017.[150] This positive experience was reinforced by the involvement of G1000 during the process of establishing the Permanent Citizens' Council.[151] G1000 is a Belgian platform for democratic innovation and they brought in global experts and provided a degree of neutrality when the parties were negotiating the change.[152]

Finally, there was perhaps a bit of luck in how the timing of the process played out. Negotiations happened in the months just prior to an election, which could have meant that they collapsed. Indeed, evidence from democratic innovation in Spain suggests that proximity to an election can make it more likely that the results of such process get ignored without explanation by politicians.[153] However, in the case of Ostbelgien the proximity to the election meant that no party felt that they could abandon a process that had been developed through consensus.[154]

6. Lessons for the UK

Having looked at the general evidence for the ability of democratic innovations to improve outcomes, foster trust in politics, and enhance citizens' knowledge, and having looked at case studies of how democratic innovations can scale, this section now draws out lessons for the UK. It focuses on lessons for how democratic innovations can contribute to systemic change in the UK political system, and does not address lessons with respect to the need for more evidence, for methodological innovation, nor on implementing democratic innovations.

Three lessons are drawn from the literature reviewed for this appendix and set out below. These lessons speak to all four families of democratic innovations since there was not sufficient evidence to provide distinct lessons. Although it should be noted that much of the evidence that exists tends to focus disproportionately on mini-publics, as such the lessons can have a mini-public flavour to them despite the intent to couch them broadly.

The first lesson is the importance of being clear on the purpose of introducing the democratic innovation. Section three described the goals of democratic innovations but these goals apply at the level of the political system as a whole. As such, it's important to know on which of the three goals the political system is doing worst and ensure that any innovations introduced aim to address this. In Ireland and Ostbelgien the goal is clearly to increase trust in politics. In Brazil the overall goal was less clear, but improved outcomes was certainly a big part of the pitch for PB. However, the fact that expectations for better outcomes went beyond the capabilities and resources of local government speaks to the next lesson.

150 Niessen and Reuchamps, 'Institutionalising Citizen Deliberation in Parliament', p.138.

151 https://www.g1000.org/en. Accessed July 21st, 2025.

152 Niessen and Reuchamps, 'Institutionalising Citizen Deliberation in Parliament'.

153 Fernàndez-Martínez et al., 'The Sin of Omission?', p.244.

154 Niessen and Reuchamps, 'Institutionalising Citizen Deliberation in Parliament', p.142.

The second lesson is that it is vital that the democratic innovation is well-integrated into the existing system. The Ostbelgien model demonstrates the different aspects of what makes this work: the scope of the democratic innovation is clear, it makes recommendations but not the final decision; the accountability mechanism is set out in the law that establishes the innovation, the Permanent Citizens' Council ensures that ministers and parliamentary committees respond to the recommendations of Citizens' Assemblies, even if is it justify a rejection; and resources are allocated by parliament to implement the innovation.

Moreover, the evidence examined for this appendix has also provided examples of what goes wrong when integration does not happen. For instance, the lack of clearly defined feedback processes led to accusations of politicians 'cherry picking' recommendations in Ireland and Spain.[155] Indeed, in France the lack of clarity in how the government would respond to the Citizens' Climate Convention led to surprise vetoes of two of the early recommendations by the President, and a breakdown of trust between the participants and government, and between participants and the citizenry at large. The latter was so acute that the participants rejected putting some ideas to a referendum because they did not really trust the public to make a good decision.[156]

The third lesson is that cross-party support is vital. This was clearly present in both Ireland and Ostbelgien, which both shared a sense that their system was facing a crisis; that something fundamental needed to change.

The literature again also provides some clear examples of what can go wrong when cross-party support is not obtained. For instance, the Madrid Citizen's Observatory was set up in January 2019 as a permanent mini-public. However, a change of government in May 2019 led to this model being rejected, and in February 2020 the Observatory returned to its previous model of merely being a meeting of politicians and civil servants to consider data about the city.[157]

In the UK context, there is wide acknowledgement that the country has faced a few difficult years, and that outcomes need to improve. However, it is probably a stretch to argue that there is a shared sense that the country is in crisis. Where there does appear to be broad cross-party consensus is on the need for more power to be devolved to communities, which is often described as aiming to improve outcomes as well as improve trust in politics.[158] When combined with a regular drumbeat of stories about politicians flouting rules, as well as survey data on trust, this does suggest that the goal for the UK should be rebuilding trust in the political system.

Finally, in support of developing policy proposals, it is useful to reflect on how messy policy is in the real world. Boswell recounts how lucky it was that he, a researcher in democratic innovation, was invited to take part in a mini-public

155 Cunningham et al., 'Ireland's Deliberative Mini-Publics'; Fernàndez-Martínez et al., 'The Sin of Omission?'

156 Giraudet et al., '"Co-Construction" in Deliberative Democracy'.

157 OECD, *Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions*, p.59.

158 Commission on the UK's Future, 'A New Britain: Renewing Our Democracy and Rebuilding the Economy', The Labour Party, 2022, 6; Department for Levelling Up, Housing, and Communities, *Levelling Up the United Kingdom*, 2022, p.xiv.

in a London borough.[159] But he also describes how sobering the experience was, as he witnessed the challenges of getting strangers to open-up on their views, potentially disagree with each other, but then collectively develop recommendations for change. This experience is not referenced in order to argue against mini-publics, but as reminder of how difficult it is to turn policy into practice.

159 John Boswell, 'Seeing Like a Citizen: How Being a Participant in a Citizens' Assembly Changed Everything I Thought I Knew about Deliberative Minipublics', *Journal of Deliberative Democracy* 17, no. 2, 2021.