Part 5: **Conclusion**

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29 Citizens' assemblies: Beyond utopian and dystopian approaches

Abstract: The concluding chapter identifies outcomes and main trends emerging from the collections of contributions included in the *Handbook*. The goal is to help relocate the conversation about citizens' assemblies on a pragmatic and well documented ground, leaving aside both over-optimistic (utopian expectancies looking for a "magic solution") and over-pessimistic portrayals (that foresee any action addressed to produce change as worsening the problems intended to resolve, failure or at too high of costs). Following Albert Hirschman (1991), it is assumed that there are dangers in both action and inaction, so CAs need to focus on canvassing and assessing and guarding against risks as much as possible. To develop this strategy, the text is structured along the following lines: the global spread of CAs beyond ethnocentric views; the discussion on their authorization, accountability, and legitimacy; their outcomes and evaluation; their scalability and best design; their public support and potential to provide answers to global challenges (climate change, global democracy); and their connection to regime type (authoritarian or democratic).

Keywords: citizen's assemblies, ethnocentrism, authorization, accountability, legitimacy, evaluation, institutional designs, public support, global challenges, regime type

29.1 Introduction

The collection of chapters presented in this first *Handbook of Citizens' Assemblies* (CAs) offers a comprehensive and broad overview of the ongoing political and theoretical debate around CAs as well as its multifaceted empirical assessment. This final chapter does not pretend to end such a rich discussion with closed conclusions but rather to identify both outcomes and main trends emerging from the contributions. The goal is to help relocate the conversation about CAs on a pragmatic and well documented ground, leaving aside both over-optimistic (utopian expectancies looking for a "magic solution") and over-pessimistic portrayals (that foresee any action addressed to produce *changes* as worsening the problems intended to resolve, failure or at too high of costs).[1] Following Albert Hirschman (1991) we assume here that there are dangers in both action and inaction, so CAs must focus on canvassing and assessing and guarding against risks as much as possible. The chapters presented in this *Handbook*

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1 Inspired by *The Rhetoric of the Reaction* (Hirschman 1991), where the author identifies the perversity thesis, futility thesis and jeopardy thesis as conservative narratives of reaction.

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share in common multiple reflections, developments, and evaluations to seriously identify their potentialities and limits to reinforce democracy. The text is structured along the following lines: the global spread of CAs beyond ethnocentric views; the discussion on their authorization, accountability, and legitimacy; their outcomes and evaluation; their scalability and best design; their public support and potential to provide answers to global challenges (climate change, global democracy); and their connection to regime type (authoritarian or democratic).

29.2 A Western focus on a global phenomenon

The *Introduction* by Julien Vrydagh (Chapter 1) sets the floor by defining our approach to CAs in a broad sense, which allows for moving beyond the narrow understanding of democratic innovations and deliberative democracy as belonging to Western democracies. Vrydagh recognizes both that CAs have historical roots and a global incidence, while the current CA revival is linked to Western democracies' developments of mini-publics and more specifically CAs. The main assumptions behind the promotion of these participatory institutions have been related to achieving conditions for consequential democratic deliberation (CAs are expected to draw a unique picture of what the whole citizenry would think about a public issue if it had the time to deliberate on the matter), to produce inclusion (understood as a result of descriptive representation of ordinary citizens, by selecting them by lot) and to have influence (effects on policy-making). But these assumptions are being challenged internally: by criticism on the theoretical approaches to CAs and their empirical evaluations, as well as externally, by works from critical perspectives and from several disciplines. The introduction acknowledges potential answers, sometimes complementary and sometimes contradictory, to the numerous questions that emerge alongside the proliferation of CAs.

29.3 Citizens' assemblies under the lens of authorization and accountability

A main objection posited to CAs are their lack of authorization and accountability, considered hallmarks of democratic representation. It is a fact that randomly selected representatives are not authorized or accountable in the same ways as elected representatives. However, Michael K. MacKenzie (Chapter 2) argues that this is flawed logic given that "CAs will be useful and valuable only if they *add* something to our democratic systems, as opposed to merely reproducing more of what we already have". MacKenzie suggests to change the focus from individuals to the institutions and calls for understanding the role played by CAs within the ecologies of other democratic institutions which are authorized and accountable to the publics they serve. In doing so, CAs are well suited to provide descriptive, discursive, surrogate, and gyroscop-

ic representation, all forms that do not require direct links to accountability. For instance, a randomly selected second chamber – a sort of permanent CA with a continually rotating membership – would not be directly accountable, in electoral terms, to the people it serves, but it would have its decisions scrutinized and sanctioned or rejected by an elected chamber. The example makes evident that the specific design and features of the CA (permanent or not, with mandatory or advisory capacities, among others) are relevant for the discussion. It is also important to remember that there are many other bodies playing central roles which are not directly accountable neither, like judges and jurors in many systems (in others they are also elected).

Agreeing with MacKenzie on considering accountability a less salient problem of CAs when they are embedded in a broader democratic system (e.g. ecologies of democratic institutions), Pierre-Etienne Vandamme (Chapter 3) invites consideration of different forms of understanding accountability. Following Jane Mansbridge's (2014) work, the author stresses that there are at least two different forms of accountability: sanction-based and trust-based, and the former could operate independently of electoral sanction. Vandamme offers some arguments in the literature about limiting individual accountability to avoid individual citizen representatives being exposed to public pressure and lobbying (for example, with the use of secret ballot). The right to recall the CA is also listed as an option to introduce institutional accountability. A remarkable point to take into account is the reconfiguration of the classical trade-off between accountability and independence when talking about CAs. This is because it is often the independence of CAs from electoral promises and public pressure that is invoked to justify their epistemic added value. "Yet, if they cannot deviate from public opinion without sanction, these epistemic benefits (including the possibility to leave room for the interests of foreigners and future generations) might be jeopardized", affirms Vandamme.

29.4 Controversial legitimacy and capacity to strengthen democracy

There is an ongoing discussion about the different types of decision-making authority CAs should have, with merely consultative on one extreme and binding on the other. For Cristina Lafont (Chapter 4) the central question is not simply about how much power their participants ought to exercise, but rather, and above all, the specific capacity in which they are supposed to exercise that power. If the goal is to enhance the democratic legitimacy of political decision-making, a positive outcome will be achieved when CAs have a positive impact and improve the quality of the deliberative process of opinion and will-formation in which the citizenry participates. Lafont's central concern in this chapter is that "If the aim of institutionalizing CAs is to empower a few participants to do the thinking, deliberating and deciding for the rest of the citizenry, then it is hard to see how these innovative institutions can have a positive democratic impact".

On a more favourable view than Lafont, Antonin Lacelle-Webster and Mark Warren (Chapter 8) explore the role of CAs in democratic systems and the ways in which they can strengthen democracy. Their first focus is on the normative problems a political system needs to solve in order to count as "democratic". And the answer provided is that a democratic system must (a) empower inclusion of those affected by collective decisions; (b) form preferences and interests into collective agendas and wills; and then (c) convert these into collective decisions, such that people rule over themselves. They look at potential sites in which CAs can strengthen democracy by supplementing other institutions and practices (elections, ballot measures, legislatures, executive agencies, public spheres, political parties, and constitutional processes) and conclude advocating for CAs in places where they can strengthen the deliberative and representative dimension of democratic polities.

A broader approach to the legitimacy challenge is offered by Stephen Elstub and Zohreh Khoban (Chapter 9), who discuss the six most prominent critiques to CAs: (1) that members of the public do not have the capacity to engage in meaningful deliberation and decision-making; (2) that CAs do not contest power relationships in society; (3) that CAs are excessively manipulated spaces, with participants having little control over the design; (4) that CAs are easily co-opted by public authorities and have little policymaking impact; (5) that CAs only include small numbers of participants, and therefore exclude most of the public from deliberation and decision-making; and (6) that because CAs are representative, they do not do enough to promote the voice and interests of minorities and marginalized groups who are most adversely affected by the policy issues. Elstub and Khoban develop a proposal within the deliberative system approach to connect CAs with other democratic institutions embedded in the political system. The main point is then to provide concrete and established links between CAs and other parts of the political system, including civil society, parliaments, government, and the media, to enhance their impact on policy debate and opinion formation in the informal and formal public spheres.

29.5 But do citizens' assemblies work for improving democracy and good governance?

Moving from theoretical approaches to literature reviews and empirical assessments, several chapters in the *Handbook* discuss the impact of CAs. Focusing on the uses of CAs to solve the crisis of democracy, Rasmus Ø. Nielsen and Eva Sørensen (Chapter 10) argue in favour of a systemic turn able to achieve more dialogue between the practitioners working to develop, refine, and institutionalize mini-public innovations and the academics who critically scrutinize their contributions to democracy. Their argument is illustrated with the assessment of four different formats of mini-publics (the Citizens' Jury and the Planning Cell; Open Space Technology, Future Search, and World Café; the Consensus Conference and the Deliberative Poll; and the Citizens' Assembly pioneered

in British Columbia). Their basic idea is "to shift or expand the scope of how mini-public formats are evaluated: from the direct and measurable effects of individual experiments to the broader functional effects that putting different mini-public formats in the toolbox of decision-makers and institutions has on the democratic system".

To answer the question about the working of CAs to improve democracy, there is a need to evaluate outcomes. Thus, how can we measure the effects of CAs? Didier Caluwaerts and Min Reuchamps (Chapter 18) build a framework for evaluating CAs inspired in the OECD *Evaluation Guidelines for Representative Deliberative Processes* (2021) that focuses on the evaluation of both process design integrity and deliberative experience. Caluwaerts and Reuchamps develop a set of criteria based on input (representativeness of the CA composition, the openness of the agenda and the epistemic completion, or in other words, the quality of information accessed), throughput (quality of participation, the quality of decision-making, and the contextual independence of the process), and output (public endorsement for the CA and its recommendations, the political uptake, and an assessment of the policy implementation). But not all criteria have the same value. The authors argue that the quality of representation (input), the quality of participation (throughput), and the political uptake (output) are primary evaluation criteria while binary assessments should be avoided.

Elisa Minsart and Vincent Jacquet's (Chapter 21) starting point is that multiplying CAs with little impact on the policymaking process would only reinforce an already existing crisis of confidence from citizens towards the political system. There is a need to know the impact of CAs on policymaking that at the same time requires a definition of impact and an accurate method to measuring it. Minsart and Jacquet identify three types of impacts: congruence with decisions, defined as "a desk-based research method which assesses impact based on the textual correspondence between a citizen-created idea and public policy documents"; consideration of CA recommendations, what is understood as references to the CAs in the discourses of different actors; and impact on structure, as enduring practices in decision making. While the previous methodology is based on discourse analysis, impact on structure can be assessed using different approaches such as surveys, interviews with civil servants or political leaders and ethnographic observation.

29.6 The scope and scalability of citizens' assemblies' recommendations

One of the most common criticisms of CAs is that they serve as symbolic or "simulative" participation or even as distracting participation. Recommendations could be well grounded but would be ignored or misused for political cherry-picking – politicians may choose recommendations they like and neglect those they dislike. Manipulation and co-optation are also typical criticisms. Brigitte Geissel (Chapter 5) focuses on the options that could ensure recommendations made by CAs are taken into ac-

count. Basing her proposal on the participatory system approach that advocates the systematic and systemic connection of collective will-formation with decision-making, Geissel envisages five models of CAs: (1) with different tasks, (2) Multi-level (3) Multi-issue Referendum (4) Randomly selected parliament and (5) Deliberation Day, all of which connect CAs to either decision-making by representatives or by citizens.

Drawing on the recent developments in the theory of deliberative democracy and their own empirical work on various other democratic practices, John Boswell, Carolyn Hendriks, and Selen A. Ercan (Chapter 7) suggest expanding the repertoire of democratic reform in contemporary democracy. Their central proposal moves the current focus on democratic reform from designing to "mending". This addresses a key criticism by opening the room to include citizens, administrators, and decision-makers in a debate that was until now controlled by "democratic designers" because "the pursuit of democratic repair needs to move away from a 'social laboratory' mode and towards an approach associated with 'reflexive governance'".

Participatory system approaches and a more flexible and inclusive understanding of CAs for democracy are complemented in the *Handbook* by a chapter devoted to proposing the interaction between different forms of referendums and CAs. In the past, deliberative and direct democracy were seen as opposites, one focusing on the quality of deliberation and opinion change and the other on empowering decisions. Nenad Stojanović (Chapter 14) offers a combination of both. He differentiates the actor who is entitled to initiate a process (institutional actors, reform advocates, or citizens at large) and the outcome of a popular vote (binding or consultative) and elaborates a conceptual roadmap regarding the linkage between CAs and mechanisms of direct democracy to present an overview of the various points within the process leading to a popular vote, in which deliberative mini-publics could be meaningfully employed. One of the limits of the proposal comes from the scant use of instruments of direct democracy. However, there are promising experiences such as the Irish model and the Citizens Initiated Referendums (CIR) or Oregon model, as well as the Swiss practice.

29.7 Who should organize citizens' assemblies and who should participate?

There is an idealized conception of ordinary citizens, whose deliberation would be epistemically superior as well as an idealized view connecting bottom-up initiatives with a more democratic approach than top-down initiatives. Sonia Bussu and Dannica Fleuß (Chapter 11) identify the two models generally in discussion when designing a CA based on who initiates the CA: bottom-up or top-down approaches. The authors make it evident that the distinction is too narrow on one hand (there are more dimensions to be taken into account) and the assumptions on their limitations and potentialities incomplete (the connection of top-down CAs with political elites and less disruptive goals and the connection of bottom-up CAs with disruptive aims to challenge established

power relations). To classify a CA, not only the initiator (public agencies or state institutions *vs* social movements, civil society, grassroots initiatives) matters, but also the level of openness in the process and the normative values and conceptions of democracy and the core aims. After reviewing concepts and evidence, Bussu and Fleuß argue that "bottom-up approaches are not necessarily better than top-down initiatives at bringing in disempowered interests and ensuring more inclusive processes, top-down CAs do not seem to have such a good record in terms of impact just because they work closely with state institutions". Thus, they favour flexible combinations of both approaches.

Standard or more common CAs are composed by so-called "ordinary citizens". Nonetheless, there are also many forms of hybridization that open room to discuss pros and cons. Clodagh Harris, David M. Farrell, and Jane Suiter (Chapter 12) analyse the topic feeding their argument in the currently best-known example of a mixed-member mini-public, the Ireland's Convention on the Constitution (2012–2014). If a central concern refers to the ways in which the politician members can frame and influence the process at the input stage, it is applicable to "pure" assemblies as well as to mixed-member forums for deliberation (MMDFs). But in the case of MMDFs, there are additional issues related to parity of esteem between the citizen members and the elected officials, as well as parity between the politician members themselves (governing and opposition parties, etc.). Harris, Farrell, and Suiter list as benefits of mixed forms that (1) the inclusion of elected representatives directly in the deliberations can ensure visibility for the recommendations, (2) it may increase politicians' and the political establishment's trust and confidence in deliberative processes, (3) including politicians may lend greater epistemic value to the process as they allow for learning by bringing different perspectives and lived experiences to bear on the given topic, and (4) mixed forms have the potential to increase trust in politics, politicians, political institutions, and the wider policymaking and legislative process. However, these benefits can be undermined by power asymmetries and elite domination.

29.8 The mini-public's opinion and the general public's opinion

Another central argument against CAs is their supposed lack of connection with the general debate – the "shortcut to democracy" to use Cristina Lafont's term (Chapter 4) –, a more general concern on public opinion and opinion change within the CAs and on the broader public. John Rountree and Nicole Curato (Chapter 6) consider how CAs form a link with the wider citizenry by contributing to public deliberation; inviting public deliberation; and triggering a meta-deliberation on the value of these assemblies in public life. In making this link, three different routes are considered: (1) members of the public may watch the deliberations unfold live or through recordings of the proceedings; (2) citizens can learn about the deliberations through the media; or (3) citi-

zens may review the final report from the assembly. These different routes may present challenges: for instance, opening public consultations could show cases where an assembly's recommendations do not align with public input. Rountree and Curato acknowledge this and argue that it does not necessarily signal a problem because deliberation is a transformative process, and assembly members after going through deliberation would not be expected to mirror public opinion.

Still, little is known about the effects of CAs on the wider public. Saskia Goldberg (Chapter 20) focuses on how CAs affect non-participating citizens and how non-participants perceive CAs. In doing so, she differentiates between theoretical claims, observed effects, citizen's expectations, and perceived legitimacy. A central claim of Goldberg's chapter is that deliberative democracy theory places high expectations on CAs, but these expectations are not consistently met in empirical studies. There are some positive empirical findings but evidence mostly refers to unsystematic single-(best)-case studies that need to be contextualized further. Finally, citizens' perceptions and support for CAs are moderately positive regarding their implementation. However, as stressed in many other chapters, context matters.

Beyond the previous discussion on the connection between public opinion and the work and recommendations of CAs, there is a discussion about the knowledge aims of CAs. Marina Lindell (Chapter 19) underlines that too much emphasis has been placed on opinion change as the primary outcome of a deliberative process while largely overlooking the quality of deliberation and its impact on these effects. Her work focuses on inclusion, diversity, and deliberative disagreement, experts and evidence, and reflection and perspective-taking and their role for these transformations. As some highly relevant findings, Lindell argues that clarification and "structured disagreement" could be more important than opinion change *per se*; and clarification may well encompass polarization, moderation, or stability of opinions. Making sure that a deliberating group has a diversity of epistemic resources as well as a diversity of perspectives, is crucial. Finally, Lindell agrees that the demand for consensus from many deliberative democrats may be counterproductive. "An expectation of reaching consensus can create an obstacle to a critical dialogue and individual perspectives may dominate the agenda and define consensus. It might also prevent minority inclusion and force minority opinions to form after the group."

CAs have been studied relatively in isolation. Many chapters here support the need to move to a systemic turn but there is also a growing request to develop a contextual approach. Rousiley C. M. Maia (Chapter 27) argues that the holistic approach to CAs cannot ignore the interfaces between discussions in deliberately designed forums and the more mundane discussions outside those forums. Maia focuses on the connection between CAs and communication studies. Including media studies and platform digitization on the research agenda is helpful to think across institutions and the wider public, as well as the interplay of deliberative and non-deliberative practices. Maia argues that "Rather than ignoring the boundaries between environments, tracking communicative practices across a set of institutions and a set of actors seems a promising research agenda for better understanding the complexities that emerge in

everyday life communication and rethinking the active role of citizens in deliberative politics."

29.9 Children, climate change and global democracy

Some challenges democracies currently face are connected to the political definition of the future in times of growing and increasingly controversial globalization. We have decided to include chapters on children participation, climate change, and supranational democracy and CAs to explore the extent to which CAs could produce solutions or are charged with unfounded expectations.

On the basis of their age and lack of capacity, children are excluded from electoral politics as well as from CAs. Against this argument, Kei Nishiyama (Chapter 13) argues for the inclusion of children providing three arguments: inclusion of children is epistemically beneficial for adult citizens to gain a deeper understanding of perspectives and interests of future generations. Inclusion of children is also beneficial for children themselves as it enables them to act as agents of democracy who communicate with various political agents (e.g., lay citizens, experts, elected officials) and influence the policymaking process, which is usually difficult to achieve in other popular simulative practices such as mock elections or mock parliaments. Finally, some forms of inclusion of children in CAs are synergistic in many ways with existing political engagement practices for children (e.g., children's parliament, social movements). Nishiyama shows the different forms in which children can be included, such as imaginary and symbolic inclusion; a*dult–child collaboration* and *adult-centric practice; and children participation, direct and consultative.* On this topic, childrens' contribution to CAs could be powerful and straightforward.

One of the most prominent topics tackled by CAs relates to global warming and climate change. CAs with this focus have been launched in France, Germany, Ireland, Belgium, and the United Kingdom, among others, and are invoked and demanded by social movements such as Extinction Rebellion as well as broader civil society networks like KNOCA, the Knowledge Network on Climate Assemblies. Louise Knops and Julien Vrydagh (Chapter 16) discuss the potential of Citizens' Climate Assemblies (CCAs) to respond to the climate crisis, both in terms of scope and ambition of policy solutions, and in terms of enhancing the democratic legitimacy of these policies. They organize the discussion around four key dimensions: territoriality (a global issue whose management is based on the nation state), temporality (policymakers face short-term consequences of their decisions and need to combine solutions for different challenges at the same time), conflict (that refers to frictions and disagreements around climate change), and denialism (the fight for the "truth" that opposes science to conspiracy at the extremes). Knops and Vrydagh show the extent to which some challenges faced are beyond the scope of CCAs:

> it is clear that CCAs on their own won't be enough to overcome the state-interests or the techno-capitalist bias that currently prevent the adoption of binding environmental policies at the global level; nor will they be able to seriously tackle questions of environmental injustice. Likewise, CCAs seem incapable of injecting some environmental reflexivity into institutional contexts that currently escape democratic control all-together, in particular among large economic actors.

The authors believe that CCAs can make important contributions to tackle climate change and increase the democratic legitimacy of climate policies, but caution CCAs as providing a silver-bullet solution.

As with climate change, there is an expectancy on CAs to promote global democratic governance. In this regard, there are several experiments at the European Union level launched by NGOs, international organizations and social movements to trigger CAs at the supranational level. Irena Fiket (Chapter 15) offers an overview of these developments based on the systemic approach to deliberation. Fiket shows that in the last fifteen years, there has been a political interest to adopt CAs to resolve the democratic deficit at the supranational level. It goes hand in hand with a broader theoretical movement for the introduction of deliberative democracy into global policymaking. However, she finds relevant differences between the supranational level in the case of the EU, on one hand, and the global political context, on the other. The first and more relevant difference is that there is a political effort at the EU to democratize the entire system of policymaking in which CAs are just a small part, while the process of democratization actually never started at the global level. With this in mind, the author does not reject the promotion of CAs as remedies to the democratic deficit at the supranational level, but calls attention to the need to discuss CAs with reference to the political context. This consideration is fundamental to avoiding the spread of symbolic experiments with high ambitions and yet less capacity to have effects.

29.10 Who supports citizens' assemblies?

Why would citizens be in favour of instruments of deliberative democracy instead of the classic representative system? Relying on empirical data, David Talukder and Jean-Benoit Pilet (Chapter 23) describe citizens' support for instruments of deliberative democracy. The authors show that many citizens tend to be in favour of such instruments, but a majority is against CAs to replace elected politicians (data come from EPIS web-based survey, in which 15,406 citizens from 15 European countries were interviewed between 13 March and 2 April 2020). They attempt to understand which factors explain or correlate with citizens' support for CAs and explore the role of political engagement, political frustration, social trust, and ideology. Evidence in general offers results conditioned by context. The study shows a difference between left-wing and right-wing citizens that has been under-theorized, and could be related to a more inclusive vision of politics by left-wing actors. Finally, the overview shows that some citizens evaluate CAs by taking into account their policy outputs, indicating that "citizens are not policy

blind. They primarily care about the policies that will be implemented, and less about the procedures and institutional arrangements to reach a decision."

CAs are far from being unanimously supported by decision-makers and there are intuitive explanations: decision-makers need to give away a part of their power when initiating a CA and then need to deal in some ways with the recommendations produced, whether implementing them or explaining why they should not be implemented. But CAs also provide decision-makers with the opportunity to increase both the legitimacy and quality of political decisions. Christoph Niessen (Chapter 24) analyses how elected officials perceive CAs, examining when they are supported and when they are opposed. Niessen builds a conceptual framework expecting elected officials' attitudes to vary depending on their interests, ideas, and institutions:

> Surprisingly, the investigation of institutional factors did not find supporting evidence of elected officials' attitudes being related to the length of their political career. This means either that other factors, be it rational or ideological ones, outweigh it, or that institutional socialization is very quick and leads politicians swiftly to defend electoral institutions over CAs.

It is self-evident that changes in the way in which policymaking is framed would affect public servants. The promotion of participatory forms of democracy would necessarily lead to changes in the role of public servants, and to the emergence of new public servants profiles, such as the figure of an individual working in the public or the private sector who works to design, implement, and/or facilitate participatory forums. Jehan Bottin and Alice Mazeaud (Chapter 25) review available data and find that "from the point of view of public agents, the value of citizen participation is less democratic than instrumental, which influences the type of processes they carry out". The study distinguishes two types of agents: those whose mission is to design and organize participatory mechanisms, and those who are in charge of a sectoral policy and who are impacted by the implementation of a deliberative process. The second group is not only much more numerous but is also affected by the organization of participatory and deliberative processes without having organized it themselves.

Finally, despite that many global and local social movements are supportive of CAs, the interaction between CAs and the development of social movements is yet to receive due attention. In the words of Andrea Felicetti (Chapter 28),

> Theoretical refinements and empirical studies show that neither overly optimistic nor exceedingly critical views help us gain a realistic assessment of what happens when these two democratic phenomena meet. Nevertheless, the study of the relationship between activism and deliberation is far from mature. The current trend towards greater interaction between movements and citizens' assemblies commands and would certainly benefit from greater research efforts on this topic.

Thus, far from showing a clear path and trend, again, there is a call for developing more research and looking more carefully at specific political processes.

29.11 "Participatory authoritarianism" and populist support to citizens' assemblies

CAs are associated with democratic settings. However, careful concern is required when examining how CAs can fit and serve political purposes in authoritarian regimes. Baobang He (Chapter 22) analyses the different uses of deliberative citizens' assemblies in China, Cuba, and Libya. In China, the authoritarian ruling is based on public reasoning, persuasion, and utilizing a diversity of consultative and deliberative devices.

> It aims to control society and manage and cultivate people through community engagement and political participation. Public deliberation serves a similar function to a fire alarm. It is a critical mechanism of crisis management that is driven by authoritarian leaders to manage democratic pressure.

What He identifies as deliberative authoritarianism would show that some forms of empowerment, even if controlled, contribute to authoritarian resilience. While this is more evident in China and to some extent in Cuba, it is not present in Libya and would explain to some extent the collapse of Gaddafi's personalized regime.

Focusing on three Latin American experiences – the Popular Councils in Cuba (PC), the Councils and Cabinets of Citizen Power in Nicaragua (CCCP), and the Communal Councils in Venezuela (CC) – Armando Chaguaceda and Raudiel Peña Barrios (Chapter 17) show how these councils which fit within our definition of CAs, work to mobilize and consult the population with very limited impact on local politics and administration. This is because several structures that enable local participation are formally created but stripped of the autonomy necessary for civic empowerment. Moreover, the subjects of participation operate as executors, receivers, and/or correctors, at the local level, of political and administrative agendas coming from above. Chaguaceda and Peña Barrios propose the category of "semi-citizens", which is halfway to the total dispossession of rights/agency (subjects) and formal recognition and empowerment. As a final conclusion, the authors stress that

> in an environment of political autocratization, the partisanship of public management and devaluation of electoral integrity, lose potential as circuits of representation based on the "people" idea, oriented to an agonist activation of democracy, to become spaces of harmonization and Schmittian suppression of politics.

And what about the connection between CAs and populism? Do populist parties and populist citizens support CAs? Kristof Jacobs (Chapter 26) identifies two strategic motivations for populists: Outcome-contingent motivations, which deal with whether or not parties will benefit from the reform; and Act-contingent motivations, which deal with the perceived electoral benefits or costs attached to the act of supporting a reform or innovations. The findings are mixed. Populist parties only seem to support CAs when they deliver the outcomes they want. This is a message for those hoping that CAs as a

tool of more popular involvement in the decision-making process placate to populist parties. More optimism brings the analysis of populist citizens. When they participate, they seem content and grade the event similar to non-populist citizens. Even more, they do not seem more motivated by a desire to get what they want: there is no difference between populists and non-populists and both groups gave the events a fairly high grade. Once again, "outcome-contingent motivations play a substantial role, but the process seems to have been good at creating satisfaction with the outcome: only very few participants were dissatisfied".

29.12 What then, for or against citizens' assemblies?

Citizens' assemblies have generated enormous expectations, idealized in their ability to lead to the best decisions based on a supposed (and highly questionable) epistemic superiority. Lately, more concerns have emerged on their lack of accountability and the limits of their legitimacy. CAs have been activated with incipient frequency, undoubtedly due to their lower political cost (compared to, for example, the calling of binding referendums, which have a direct effect in challenging authorities' power and decisions). The representativeness of CAs is understood as based on descriptive representation or on representing "ordinary people", but their lack of accountability or lack of authorization are some of the supposed weakest aspects. This review allows us to maintain that it is the isolation in which most CAs tend to be designed that presents the main challenge to their success. The lack of accountability will not be a problem if CAs are included in participatory ecologies and even combined with referendums. But their lack of incidence and embeddedness and laboratory design will undermine their capacity to reinforce democracy.

Despite support by some social movements, the available evidence shows that there is not majoritarian support to replace a representative system with CAs. Utopian approaches to CAs do not contribute to understanding their potential from a realistic approach. Even more, it would be wrong to assume that CAs are by default democratic. As the prominent example of China shows, CAs can be implemented in authoritarian contexts with relative success (some degree of incidence in the definition of public affairs perceived as non-conflictive by the regime). This evidence does not play against CAs but it does play against simplified approaches to controversial processes. Current developments show that there has also been an idealization of bottom-up mechanisms and the benefits of activating assemblies made up "purely" by ordinary citizens (ignoring or undermining the role of public servants and practitioners and the potential benefits of hybrid models that include politicians). The different chapters included in this *Handbook* relocate the debate on more pragmatic and complex bases, which did not reveal binary and definitive classifications, but rather invite us to consider the contexts and dynamics of the democratic process outside design laboratories.

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