Boswell John (Orcid ID: 0000-0002-3018-8791)

Integrating Citizen Deliberation into Climate Governance: Lessons on Robust Design from Six Climate Assemblies

John Boswell, Rikki Dean, Graham Smith

John Boswell, University of Southampton, Southampton, UK. Correspondence to j.c.boswell@soton.ac.uk, Highfield Campus S017 1BJ, +44 23 8059 5000 (phone), +44 23 8059 3131 (fax)

Rikki Dean, Goethe University Frankfurt, Frankfurt am Main, Germany

Graham Smith, University of Westminster, London, UK

Abstract

Recent years have seen a 'wave' of national climate assemblies, which bring together randomly-selected citizens to deliberate and make recommendations on aspects of the climate crisis. Assessments of the legitimacy of these interventions and their capacity to improve climate governance have focused on their *internal design characteristics*, but the fundamental question of how they are integrated into complex constellations of political and policy institutions is underexplored. This article constructs a framework for understanding their *integrative design characteristics*, drawing on recent work on 'robust governance'. The framework is used to explore the connection of six national-level climate assemblies with political institutions, public debate and civil society. Our findings highlight immense variety in the integrative design of these climate assemblies. This variety challenges the view of assemblies as a standardised object with predictable effects on legitimacy and governance capacity, whilst also refining deliberative systems theory's highly abstracted conceptions of integration and impact.

Keywords

Climate assemblies; citizens' assemblies; climate change; deliberative mini-publics; deliberative systems; robust governance; governance theory; democratic design

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the Special Issue editors for their feedback and encouragement as we developed this paper. We also thank Julien Vrydagh as well as colleagues at the Democratic Innovations Research Unit at Goethe University Frankfurt for their helpful comments on earlier drafts. We are grateful to the Knowledge Network on Climate Assemblies (KNOCA) community which provided first-hand experience and insights into the functioning and impact of assemblies across Europe.

Author Bios

John Boswell is a Professor of Politics at the University of Southampton. His interests include deliberative democracy, public policy and interpretive research methods. He has written

This article has been accepted for publication and undergone full peer review but has not been through the copyediting, typesetting, pagination and proofreading process which may lead to differences between this version and the Version of Record. Please cite this article as doi: 10.1111/padm.12883

over 30 articles and 3 books on these themes, including most recently *Mending Democracy* (with Carolyn Hendriks and Selen Ercan).

Rikki Dean is a Postdoctoral Fellow in the Democratic Innovations Research Unit at Goethe University Frankfurt and Johanna Quandt Young Academy Fellow. His research combines democratic theory, public administration theory and empirical social science to understand participatory governance initiatives and political process preferences. His work is published in top journals such as *Governance*, *Political Studies* and *Policy and Politics*.

Graham Smith is Professor of Politics at the Centre for the Study of Democracy at the University of Westminster. His main research interests are in democratic theory and practice, particularly democratic innovations and their relationship with climate governance and other long-term political challenges. Recent publications include *Can Democracy Safeguard the Future* and *Democracy in a Pandemic: Participation in Response to Crisis.* He is the founding chair of the Knowledge Network on Climate Assemblies.

Declarations

i. Data availability

To the extent possible, we have made that underlying data on which this analysis is based available in our Methodological Appendix. This includes hyperlinks to all key documentary sources. However, some of our interpretation is based on engagement in KNOCA events and informal discussions with policy actors involved in delivering the climate assemblies, and is not amenable to open access and sharing.

ii. Funding

There is no specific funding to declare.

iii. Conflict of interest

There are no conflicts of interest to declare.

iv. Ethics approval

This research does not draw on any personal data, and so was not subject to ethical clearance at our institutions.

v. Patient consent data

Not applicable.

vi. Permission to reproduce material

Not applicable.

Abstract

Recent years have seen a 'wave' of national climate assemblies, which bring together randomly-selected citizens to deliberate and make recommendations on aspects of the climate crisis. Assessments of the legitimacy of these interventions and their capacity to improve climate governance have focused on their *internal design characteristics*, but the fundamental question of how they are integrated into complex constellations of political and policy institutions is underexplored. This article constructs a framework for understanding their *integrative design characteristics*, drawing on recent work on 'robust governance'. The framework is used to explore the connection of six national-level climate assemblies with political institutions, public debate and civil society. Our findings highlight immense variety in the integrative design of these climate assemblies. This variety challenges the view of assemblies as a standardised object with predictable effects on legitimacy and governance capacity, whilst also refining deliberative systems theory's highly abstracted conceptions of integration and impact.

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Introduction

Climate assemblies – deliberative mini-publics (DMPs) that bring together randomly-selected people to learn, deliberate and make recommendations on aspects of the climate crisis – are gaining in salience as an innovative approach to enhance democratic governance of the climate crisis. Politicians, administrators, experts, engagement practitioners and social movement activists have all advocated for DMPs as a novel way to develop policy solutions that meet the scale of the challenge and command widespread legitimacy. Recent national-level climate assemblies in Denmark, France, Germany, Ireland, Scotland and the UK, are the most high profile example of what the OECD (2020) celebrates as a "deliberative wave" of experimentation. Initial enthusiasm about the transformative potential of climate assemblies is beginning to give way to more sober and contested assessments of what each process has achieved, raising the question of what we should realistically expect climate assemblies to offer climate governance.

Both the design of, and political debates surrounding, climate assemblies have been predominantly conducted in terms of a narrow idea of success as linear policy impact. In this vision, climate assemblies offer a protected space, free from the exclusions and distortions that characterise existing institutions and the public sphere, where better policies can be developed that should then simply be taken up by empowered institutions. Yet this conception pays no heed to the 'downstream' complexities of policy and administration - almost no form of designed 'input' to the policymaking process has a stable and linear impact on outcomes. In line with contemporary design thinking in both normative democratic theory and the study of public administration, it is important to see climate assemblies as an intervention into a complex constellation of political and policy institutions. To understand what they can contribute to this governance system, we require a more nuanced analytical framework for articulating their integration with other actors and institutions.

In this paper, we draw on emerging ideas about 'robust governance' (Sørensen and Ansell 2021) for that purpose. Robust governance provides the basis for a more nuanced framework through which to understand the integration of climate assemblies into a complex and fluid governance system. This enables us to revisit and refine expectations of how DMPs such as climate assemblies can connect to other political actors and institutions across three domains of polity, politics and policy. We use this framework to explore the attempts to integrate six recent national-level climate assemblies. In doing so, we add granularity to these domains by illustrating the important integrative design concerns for understanding climate assemblies' and their potential to positively impact politics and policy-making. Our findings show that these integrative design concerns are an important source of substantial variation in practice, forcing a re-evaluation of orthodox conceptions of DMPs that are based solely on internal design features.

The Challenges of Designing Mini-Public Deliberation

Scholars in the 1990s and 2000s especially trained attention on deliberative mini-publics (DMPs) as practical manifestations of deliberative democratic ideals in action (Setälä and Smith 2018). The entry of DMPs into the mainstream of policy work through innovations like climate assemblies coincides with a shift in scholarly thinking about DMPs. In particular, there has been a reaction against the micro or internal focus on isolated settings and

towards asserting a 'systemic' account of deliberative democracy (see Owen and Smith 2015 for a critical review). A systems approach recognises deliberative democratic ideals as better manifested through interconnected but differentiated settings – each of which displays some but not all the characteristics and qualities associated with the ideals – rather than attempting to perfect the public sphere in an isolated and artificial setting. The increasingly orthodox normative view is that DMPs represent a narrow and limited manifestation of normative ideals, which in practice can be vulnerable to co-optation, distortion or marginalization when met with *realpolitik* outside the forum.

Table 1: A note on terminology

Deliberative mini-publics (DMPs)	Bodies that combine random selection and deliberation, including citizens' assemblies, citizens' juries, consensus conferences and deliberative polling
Citizens' assemblies	Deliberative mini-publics that tend to combine larger numbers (100-150 at national level) with longer periods of deliberation
Climate assemblies	Citizens' assemblies that focus on aspects of climate policy

These concerns reflect recent trends in 'design thinking' both in normative theorising on democracy (see especially Saward 2020) and in practical research in public administration (see Peters 2018; Howlett et al 2018). A long tradition of 'institutional design' unites scholars and reformers thinking about ideal democratic institutions and systems (in normative democratic theory), and governance architecture and specific policy interventions (in public administration).[1] However, contemporary 'design thinking' starts from the acknowledgment that systems of democratic governance are highly complex, and that interventions can be unpredictable and subject to inadvertent consequences. It represents a move away from a 'technocratic and engineering approach' (Peters 2018), reimagining design as a pragmatic, agile, adaptive process of trial and error rather than a stable imposition of any carefully calibrated intervention.

Applied to DMPs, then, this evolution in design thinking moves away from a focus on the *internal design characteristics* of any such intervention (i.e., random participant selection, the use of informational stimuli, and discussion coordination and facilitation) and towards a focus on *integrative design characteristics* that seek to embed an intervention in its social, political and administrative context (see Table 2 for a comparison of internal versus integrative design characteristics).

Though usually without conscious reference to design thinking, an emerging focus in the study of DMPs takes these integrative concerns seriously. Under the rubric of the 'systems turn', this scholarship seeks better understanding of what DMPs can realistically contribute to democratic politics (Jacquet and van der Does 2021; Curato and Böker 2016; Felicetti, Niemeyer, and Curato 2016; Goodin and Dryzek 2006; Beauvais and Warren 2019). These accounts begin to provide more nuanced interpretations of the varied and diffuse mechanisms by which DMPs can improve the legitimation capacity of the political system.

[1] See, for example, the contributions from normative political theorists and public administration scholars to the Theories in Institutional Design series published by Cambridge University Press.

Though promising, this systemic approach to DMPs remains embryonic. So far, it has tended to focus on theorising a broad set of normative standards upon which DMPs should be judged or an abstracted set of roles they can fulfil. But these standards and roles have lacked a connection to governance theory. Relatively little attention has been given to issues of real-world design and the importance of practical challenges and contextual factors in shaping practice (Dean, Boswell, and Smith 2020). As such, there is substantial scope for theoretical development on integrative design through empirical observation.

Analytical Framework: Linking robust governance and mini-public deliberation

This article takes up that task. We deploy Sørensen and Ansell's (2021) work on robust governance to develop an analytical framework for understanding the integrative design of climate assemblies. Robust governance entails "a purposeful effort to promote effective problem-solving through the strategic design of an institutional architecture, providing tools and processes that promote flexible adaptation to challenging conditions and the innovative exploration and exploitation of emerging opportunities" (Sørensen and Ansell 2021, 5). The defining feature of the robustness of a political system is its ability to transform challenging political demands into collectively binding decisions that authoritatively allocate value. As such, it shares strong affinities with the normative ideas underpinning DMPs.

Robust governance extends across three domains: polity, politics and policy. These three domains provide a means to structure our investigations in a way that goes beyond the roots of deliberative systems in normative democratic theory to also encompass governance theory. Robust governance therefore appeals as an especially fruitful means of thinking about the impact of DMPs in the more holistic way that the systemic turn and contemporary design thinking demand. In the discussion below, we outline for each of these domains the affinities both with the underpinning appeal of DMPs (their internal design characteristics and concerns) and, more importantly, with challenges laid out in the 'systemic turn' in deliberative democracy and contemporary design thinking (their integrative design characteristics and concerns). Drawing out these affinities helps us to develop and refine key questions through which to assess the wider impact of climate assemblies.

DMPs and Polity Robustness

In Sørensen and Ansell's approach, contributing to *polity robustness* means altering rules and practices of institutions in ways that build trust and increase capacities for effective governance. There are affinities here to long-standing debates about design characteristics and practices of DMPs. DMPs have been presented and assessed as intentional designs meant to remedy deficits of existing political institutions. The defining feature that distinguishes DMPs from those existing institutions is the practice of civic lottery. This practice is intended, first, to solve a problem of inclusion, by better representing the diversity of perspectives within the population (in a context of systematically biased representative institutions) and, second, to increase the problem-solving capacity of institutions by selecting participants who are not subject to the same electoral and institutional pressures of other political actors that may stymie adaptation and innovation (see especially Smith 2021). In addition, the deliberativeness of these interventions is intended to mend a broken communicative link between the public and their institutions building recursive communication capacity (Mansbridge 2017), and feeding through into

heightened perceptions of efficacy and trust among participants (Grönlund, Setälä, and Herne 2010).

For all the apparent promise of these internal design characteristics to promote polity robustness, disquiet has grown about the limited integration of DMPs. Critics worry that a persistent failure to meaningfully embed DMPs beyond ad hoc moments limits their capacity to impact democratic institutions and practices (Bussu et al. 2022). Some even point to the abuse of DMPs by elites attempting to neutralise controversy and ultimately further alienate the wider public (Lee 2014; Johnson 2015). This has prompted an emphasis in accounts of deliberative systems on how DMPs interact with other political institutions, largely theorised in terms of "institutional coupling" (Hendriks 2016) – for example, should a DMP be tightly coupled to its commissioner with the attendant risk to its autonomy, or loosely coupled with a risk of loss of influence? However, this incipient discussion has remained highly abstract and lacks a consideration of the indirect ways that the presence of a mini-public may affect the operations of other institutions (Dean, Rinne, and Geissel 2019). As such, there is a need for empirical explorations of how different forms of integration manifest.

DMPs and Political Robustness

In Sørensen and Ansell's account, contributing to *political robustness* means connecting diverse stakeholders to transform social conflicts into political agendas for effective governance. DMPs have long been associated with this sort of transformative potential. Indeed, they are said to offer a 'recipe' for a better public sphere, internally organised to cocoon participants from the distortions that characterise mass democratic debate. They bring together diverse perspectives from people unconstrained by accountability relationships to a constituency or organisational hierarchy in a facilitated space oriented towards mutual respect and understanding. As such, they approximate an ideal environment for reflective transformation of preferences, through which the group may alight upon new solutions to old problems and conflicts (Fung 2003). Importantly for the climate issue, the deliberative format can induce consideration of unrepresented interests, such as future generations (Smith 2021). As a result of this transformation potential, DMPs are seen as potential breakers of deadlocked political conflicts.

Nevertheless, even if DMPs foster transformation internally amongst their members, it is increasingly recognised that this may not easily translate into a transformation of the wider public sphere. Random selection, for example, may foster internal transformation through the selection of non-partisans - however, these participants' abstraction from the actual conflict may result in decisions that none of the parties to the conflict will accept (Dean 2018). Indeed, prominent research in pushing forward the 'systemic turn' has focused on how the legitimacy of DMPs gets questioned within broader public debate and political discourse (Parkinson 2006; Hendriks 2012). The response has been a concerted effort to seed and study the 'scaling up' of the transformative benefits of DMPs to the wider political context (Setälä 2017). Measures have included, for instance, efforts to integrate internal deliberations with coverage in the mass media, or incorporate important civil society actors into the governance of DMP processes. However, research on 'scaling up' remains focused on broad strategies, and has not yet shed light on the dynamics of how they work in practice.

DMPs and Policy Robustness

Contributing to *policy robustness*, according to Sørensen and Ansell, means generating relevant policies while mobilising sustained political agency in support of adaptive implementation. Again, DMPs have an ambivalent status on this domain. On the one hand, the internal design characteristics of DMPs are thought to elicit 'epistemically superior outcomes' (Landemore 2020). Within a DMP, expert and advocate witnesses deliver testimony that is interrogated by the participants, ensuring that conventional wisdom and evidence is refracted through the diverse viewpoints and interests of the participants. In this sense, it has been common to conceive of DMPs as a consultative mechanism that policy-makers can use to understand 'informed public opinion' (Fishkin 2009). On the other hand, it is this claim to epistemic authority that in one sense hinders sustained political agency, making the recommendations of the DMP an end-point, rather than a stage in an iterative process of 'deliberation-making' (Curato and Böker 2016). DMPs have traditionally been conceived as a one-shot injection into the policy process, based purely on the persuasive power of their outputs, ignoring the messy reality of how policy outputs are shaped downstream (Boswell 2016). The robust governance framework thus draws attention to an important lacuna in research on DMPs. To date, there is still very little sense of what meaningful 'impact' from DMPs might look like in this more complex and iterative form, and how the outputs from DMPs might connect to or enable sustained agency through the policy process.

Table 2: Summary of Internal and Integrative Design Characteristics of DMPs

	Internal Design Characteristics	**Integrative Design Characteristics**
Polity	Focus on DMP's capacities to avoid the exclusions and communicative dysfunctions of existing democratic institutions.	Focus on optimal arrangements for connecting DMPs into operational practice of existing democratic institutions
Politics	Focus on DMPs as approximating an ideal deliberative venue that fosters mutual understanding and reflective transformation of preferences.	Focus on scaling up preference transformation through efforts to connect DMPs to civil society via stakeholder engagement and media profile
Policy	Focus on DMPs as delivering superior epistemic quality of policy recommendations.	Focus on maximising impact by finding ways to connect DMPs and their outputs in an iterative relation to the policy process.

In sum, DMPs' contribution to democratic governance is just as much a function of their integrative design as their internal design, but several open questions emerge concerning the integration of DMPs. We draw on robust governance to provide a framework to analyse this integration more comprehensively and rigorously; one that aligns with the aims of DMP advocates to reform the polity, transform political conflicts and foster better policy. Accordingly, in the next sections, we use the framework to address three questions derived from the integrative design characteristics described in Table 2:

- How have actors attempted to connect climate assemblies to the polity, namely the operations of existing political and policy institutions?
- How have actors attempted to connect climate assemblies to stakeholders and media to react to or shape the political context?
- How have actors attempted to maintain influence for climate assemblies through an iterative connection to the policy process?

Through this examination we begin to articulate the different dimensions of integrative design that are pertinent for understanding climate assemblies' prospects of realising polity, political and policy robustness.

Methods and Cases: Analysing National Climate Assemblies across Europe

Our turn to practice is founded in the interpretive approach to analytical abduction. We move between theoretical categories and empirical observations to explore, flesh out and refine theoretical expectations (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2011). We assess the proliferation of national climate assemblies across Europe in the last five years. This is a phenomenon that has recently gained momentum after more than a decade of sporadic interest and innovation in the use of DMPs to inform climate policy. The first time climate was dealt with by a national-level citizens' assembly was as part of the Irish Citizens' Assembly 2016-2018, more famous for its recommendation on the constitutional status of abortion. The main wave of assemblies began two years later with the French Citizens' Convention for the Climate (Torney 2021) starting its work in October 2019 and Climate Assembly UK (CAUK) in January 2020 (Elstub et al. 2021). Since then, national climate assemblies have been organised in Scotland, Denmark, and Germany. At the time of writing, three further national assemblies were underway in Austria, Luxembourg and Spain, with other governments giving it serious attention. In addition, a large number of more local climate assemblies have already been organised across Europe, as well as a global assembly preceding COP26 in Glasgow.

Our analysis focuses on the national climate assemblies that have taken place in Europe before the end of 2021.[2] We selected these national assemblies for analysis, rather than local climate assemblies, because they were typically more highly resourced and higher profile initiatives with more significant potential for impact on critical climate policies. We draw largely on the documentary record – project websites, media coverage, and formal and informal evaluations – supplemented with experiential insights and reflections from assembly organisers, facilitators and observers (see the Methodological Appendix for more information). Contra existing evaluations of these assemblies, we focus less on the internal design characteristics and more on their integration (or lack thereof) into the political process, which is crucial for understanding their contribution to robust governance. Our ambitions for this paper are largely conceptual. Rather than comprehensively describe each case, we aim to contextualise each assembly in order to extract important considerations of integrative design.

[2] For summaries of these national assemblies, see https://knoca.eu/previous-climate-assemblies/. Our analysis does not include Jersey's Climate Assembly or Finland's Citizens' Jury on Climate Action which are listed by the Knowledge Network on Climate Assemblies. Both are smaller initiatives and the latter has a significantly different design as its name suggests,

Table 3 provides an overview of the six assemblies. The assemblies share basic internal design characteristics. They all use a form of stratified random sampling to select somewhere between 99 to 150 participants against a range of demographic and attitudinal criteria. They engage a diversity of expert witnesses to increase participants' understanding of the climate crisis and the impact of various policy options. They facilitate deliberation and decision making amongst participants on proposals which appear in a final report. These elements secure the family resemblance of our cases, but differences emerge in who commissions assemblies, the remits they work on, the time spent working together, the way they organise internally, authoring and voting on proposals, budgets and official responses. As recent phenomena, the ramifications of their activities have not been fully realised. Since our focus is on integrative design rather than eventual outcome, the variation they bring to our understanding of climate assemblies is critical in considering the way they might contribute to robust governance.

Table 3. Characteristics of national climate assemblies

	Citizens' Assembly 2016-2018, Ireland	**Citizens' Convention for the Climate, France**	**Citizens' Assembly UK**	**Scotland's Climate Assembly**	**Denmark's Climate Assembly**	**German Citizens' Assembly on Climate**
Timing	Sept-Nov 2017. Seven weekends in person	Oct 2019-June 2020. Seven weekends in person plus two interim sessions online. Feb 2021. Additional weekend in person to review official response	Jan-May 2020. Three weekends in person plus two weekends online.	Nov 2020-March 2021. Seven weekends online. Additional weekend in person to review official response	Oct 2020-March 2021. First phase. Two weekends and three evenings, plus ad-hoc meetings for editing. All online. Oct-Dec 2021. Second phase. Similar structure.	April-June 2021. Eight weekday evenings and four full Saturdays online.
Commissioner	Government with parliamentary resolution	President, although formally established by letter from Prime Minister	Six parliamentary select committees	Scottish Government following amendment to climate legislation	Ministry of Climate, Energy and Utilities	Bürgerbegehren Klimaschutz
Remit	How the state can make Ireland a leader in tackling climate change?	How can France cut greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by at least 40% by 2030 compared to 1990, in a spirit of social justice?	How can the UK reduce greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2050?	How should Scotland change to tackle the climate emergency in an effective and fair way?	To contribute and provide recommendations to the political process of climate transition, in particular to the Climate Action Plan.	To make recommendations for Germany to comply with Paris Climate Protection Agreement while considering social, economic and ecological compatibility.
Participants	99	150	108	105	99	160
Internal practices	Whole assembly considered all issues. Small group facilitation Developed own proposals Plenary votes on proposals	Randomly divided into 5 thematic groups. Self-directed groups Developed own proposals Plenary votes on proposals	Randomly divided into 3 thematic groups Small group facilitation Primarily considered expert generated options Groups voted on proposals. Plenary on common proposals	Randomly divided into 5 thematic groups Small group facilitation Developed own proposals Plenary votes on proposals	Randomly divided into 5 thematic groups Self-directed groups Developed own proposals Plenary votes on proposals	Randomly divided into 5 thematic groups Small group facilitation Developed own proposals Plenary votes on proposals

Output	13 recommendations	149 draft laws, regulations and referendums	51 recommendations (with over 80% support)	81 recommendations	117 recommendations in first phase 73 in second phase	84 recommendations
Official Response	Considered by Joint Oireachtas Committee on Climate Action (JOCCA) which influenced government's Climate Action Plan 2019 and subsequent Climate Action Bill 2020.	Macron originally promised "no filter" for proposals. Climate and Resilience Law translates some aspects of the proposals	Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Select Committee inquiry and report on the findings.	Official government response published in December 2021.	Government committed to treat recommendations in the same way as "climate partnerships" established with major sectors of the economy.	Public responses from most political parties during federal election campaign.
Budget	€1.5 million for whole assembly which lasted over a year	€5.5 million	€620K (most coming from Foundations)	£1.4 million	€74K (delivery organisation, Danish Board of Technology cross-subsidised)	€1.9 million

Analysis: Integrative design in action

Designing for polity robustness

Though citizens' assemblies are often maligned for their lack of integration, we find in each case an intentional effort to connect the climate assembly to existing political institutions with the aim to contribute to polity robustness – that is, to shift institutional rules, norms or procedures to deal more constructively with climate politics. The primary characterising feature of our examples on this domain is their diversity. They vary greatly on two key dimensions: the type of institution they connect to and the extent of their integration.

The most common connection type is with government. Denmark, France, Ireland and Scotland are all examples of *governmental connections* – namely, they are connected to an institution with direct authority to take policy actions. However, they are quite different sub-types. Even though the French Convention was formally launched by a letter from the Prime Minister instructing the Economic, Social and Environmental Council (ESEC), the main connection was to President Macron, the head of the government. It was Macron who publicly launched the Convention and received its report. Thus, this is an example of a *governmental-presidential* connection. The Danish Climate Assembly is connected to the development of the Climate Action Plan of the Ministry of Climate, Energy and Utilities, thus an example of a *governmental-administrative* connection. While Ireland and Scotland are also both connected to government in the sense that this is the institution that commissioned the assembly and is expected to provide a formal response, both were formally constituted by parliament through resolution (Ireland) and amendment to climate legislation (Scotland) and parliament is expected to play a role in terms of oversight and scrutiny. They are a form of hybrid *governmental-parliamentary* connection. The UK is the sole example of a pure *parliamentary connection*, more specifically *parliamentary-scrutiny* connection, operating through parliamentary oversight committees, rather than speaking directly to government. The German assembly is unique in having a different commissioner to the target of its recommendations. The civil society commissioners primarily targeted the assembly's recommendations towards the leaders and officials of political parties, with the

aim of informing positions in campaigning during the run-up to the 2021 Federal Election and the negotiation process for the coalition agreement that followed the election results. As such, it should be viewed predominantly as a hybrid form of *civil society-party political connection.* Across the six cases, we find five different alternatives for integration into the political system, and since these types were inductively generated, they do not include other hypothetical alternatives for which we do not have data. This diversity of connections shows that the first question we must ask when trying to understand whether climate assemblies can improve polity robustness is: which part of the polity?

The six climate assemblies also vary greatly in the extent to which their integration into these political institutions is formalised, both in terms of closeness of connection and the extent to which the connection is codified. On the most formalised end of the spectrum is the Irish Citizens' Assembly, which has a firm legal footing, clearly articulating which institution it is connected to and the form of this connection. At the loose end of the spectrum is the German assembly, which was conducted solely by civil society organisations and had no formal connection to the political parties that were the intended object of its recommendations. The other assemblies are somewhere between these two poles. For example, the connection was not formally codified in France. In Denmark, the government publicly committed to putting the assembly on the same standing as climate partnerships with major social and economic interests.

This marked variation across just six assemblies, in the types and extent of integration, draws attention to how much is missed when, based on their internal design characteristics, climate assemblies are assumed to be a uniform object that can simply be inserted into a political system with uniform effects. These integrative design concerns have significant theoretical and practical implications for how we should understand and design deliberative interventions in a complex institutional system.

Designing for political robustness

Climate assemblies can operate with different degrees of politicisation. This is inherent in how they are articulated in relation to social conflicts and can affect their orientation to political institutions, civil society organisations and the media. Within the cases, we find varying degrees of politicisation on these dimensions that can be classified into two broad models – accommodation and transformation.

The accommodation model offers a 'depoliticised' stand-in for public spheres – here, its design and function protects and insulates the assembly from outside distortion, showcasing an alternative vision of what a purer public sphere might think about climate change. Most of the cases approximate this model. The critique that this type of assembly simply attempts to bypass civil society is not reflected in our cases, however. The relationship can be fraught – DMPs can be perceived as a threat to or distraction from hard-won status and insider influence, and organised interests can seek to undermine or marginalise their impact (see Hendriks 2012). Nevertheless, this was recognised by many of the organisers, who 'front footed' the relationship with social interests by creating advisory and stewarding bodies with responsibility for helping set the remit and determine the content and range of expertise provided to participants. The most common strategy, adopted by the Irish, UK, Scottish and German assemblies, is the creation of both multi-stakeholder and expert advisory bodies to ensure that competing social interests and experts with different perspectives are integrated into the process. The strategy is to bind different and often

competing interests into the process, building goodwill for its outcomes. There was some notable success here. The German assembly, commissioned by Bürgerbegehren Klimaschutz and Scientists for Future, counted 100 civil society groups among its supporters. However, evidence exists of difficulties in integrating more radical climate movements. Despite their vocal support for citizens' assemblies, Extinction Rebellion (XR) Scotland activists who had accepted an invitation to join the Stewarding Group of Scotland's Climate Assembly resigned in the run-up to the first weekend, arguing that the assembly was not radical enough in its ambitions. XR's criticisms of the agenda and recommendations for CAUK were even stronger.

All the assemblies had a media strategy through which they attempted to connect the assembly to the broader public sphere. Within the accommodation model this should largely be viewed as a dissemination strategy. The aim is not to dramatize the deliberations themselves for media or public consumption; in contrast, the participants and their deliberations were mostly protected from media scrutiny during the process. The argument here is that media visibility may well affect the willingness of participants to reflect and reconsider their perspectives. All assemblies webcast plenary sessions live, but the reality is that this is relatively dull viewing for those not participating in the assembly itself. The main focus is on disseminating the recommendations for broader public consumption, packaging the outcomes of the deliberation as a ready-made transformation of the social conflict. This has proved hard to sell to a media that prefers celebrity, novelty and controversy. In the UK, for example, media interest was piqued when Sir David Attenborough welcomed the assembly and on the day its report was released, with most focus on the more controversial recommendations on reducing meat consumption and flying. A documentary about the process has been aired on BBC. Yet for the most part media and public awareness has been minimal. The same is true in Ireland. This is particularly notable given that climate change was dealt with by the same Assembly as abortion, which received extensive media coverage. The salient difference is that latter issue was put to a referendum. The referendum provides a clear rationale for why the media should report to the broader public and for why the public should have an interest in paying attention. The incentive to pay attention to a deliberative body handing over completed recommendations to a political institution is more oblique, given a clear pathway to public action is generally not obvious.

The outlier among the six cases is the French Convention, which is the sole exemplar of the more politicised, transformation model. The different genesis of the Convention (compared to our other cases) largely helps to explain this different approach. The Convention can be traced back to the protests of the Yellow Vests and climate activists. As a political response to the challenge to his legitimacy, Macron organised the Grand National Debate in early 2019 that included a number of regional DMPs. Drawing on this experience, Citizens' Vests (a coalition of more moderate Yellow Vest and climate and democracy activists) was able to persuade Marcon to organise the Convention. Its internal operations were also arguably more political than the other assemblies. The capacity to direct the assembly was concentrated into a Governance Committee of political appointees. The 15 permanent members (two randomly-selected members of the Convention also participated) and three Guarantors (to ensure the robustness of the process) were appointed following close door negotiations between key actors in the presidency, the Ministry of Ecological and Inclusive Transition, the ESEC, think tanks and members of Citizens' Vests. While it ensured some coverage of different interests – climate experts, participatory democracy experts,

representatives of the economic and social sector and appointees of the Ministry – the Committee and Guarantors were more vocally partisan in both their membership and orientation. It also adopted a much more laissez-faire approach to the members, enabling more autonomy both within and outside the Convention. This is the case for the facilitation style, which enabled members to self-organise in their assigned workstreams and to work closely with experts and advocates in the development of recommendations, and for media access, with many of the assembly members making regular appearances in old and new media during and after the assembly. Alongside Macron's launch of the report and appearance at the Convention, these factors resulted in greater media and public profile for the Convention, demonstrating that climate assemblies can become a focal point for broader public discourse.

The broader lesson is that designing for political robustness is a complicated and multifaceted challenge. Since climate assemblies are interventions into complex political systems, their integrative design can be informed by deliberate strategy but it also entails adaptive responses to fast-moving events.

Designing for policy robustness

The design of citizens' assemblies appears at first-sight to be ill-suited to generating the concerted collective action that defines policy robustness. Nevertheless, from our cases we find a much more complicated and interesting story than the conclusions that one would deduce from formal design alone – and again, one marked by interesting patterns of (internal) commonality and (external) variation. What the six assemblies all, to a large extent, share is a set of encoded common features of the format of citizens' assemblies: they were all designed time-limited projects reliant on the persuasive power of their recommendations, without any formal representation in the political processes of decision-making and implementation that follow. As time-limited projects, the impetus is to resolve the issue once-and-for-all and they have all made a claim to both epistemic and moral authority, presenting their recommendations as the end of the process, rather than the beginning of ongoing negotiation. Still, in practice, we find some diversity in the extent to which there is latitude for downstream adaptation.

One key dimension here is remit; the extent to which each assembly had an open-ended remit to generate recommendations, or a more closed remit designed to feed into existing or pre-identified policy priorities. In Ireland, for example, the recommendations set a broad agenda for climate policy with details to be developed by officials. The orientation was similar in Germany, where organisers hoped that the citizens' recommendations might set a broad direction for adoption and adaptation in the new parliament. Contrast this with France where members authored draft laws, regulations and referendums ready to be implemented or Denmark where participants developed specific policy proposals for consideration within the Ministry's climate plan. The UK case differs considerably as, in the main, members were engaged in policy appraisal – considering scenarios and policies proposed by expert leads. These alternative approaches were largely determined by where the commissioning institutions were in the policy cycle, again demonstrating the flexibility with which the format has been adopted in different contexts.

Looking beyond the outputs themselves and their 'fit' in the immediate policy context, we see assemblies in each case also have a staying power or legacy beyond the immediate life

of the process. They have all in different ways broken the time-limited mould through informal action and tweaks to the formal design

First is the dimension of mobilisation. Participants did not always pack up and go home after their assemblies officially ended. The starkest example of participant *ex post* self-organisation is in the French case, where some members created the non-profit organisation, *Les 150*, to monitor progress of their proposals. Members were subsequently invited by the French Government to work on converting proposals into policy. This example shows an important legacy of politicisation. Politicisation can transform a seemingly one-off assembly into a more lasting political movement better capable of connecting to the more complex and clandestine processes of policymaking. But in solving one problem with DMPs – that of follow through – this model has potentially created another, with *Les 150* now taking on an ambiguous role divorced from the Convention's initial 'representative' mandate, more akin to the 'expert citizens' Bang and Sørensen (1999) observe in everyday engagement and consultation. While France is an outlier, it is common for organisers to select particular members to become the face of the assembly, publicly presenting recommendations on behalf of the Assembly. This is most extensive in Germany, where members have participated in meetings with representatives of the political parties. Elsewhere, it is other institutional actors who have become key champions for the assembly after the event. A clear example is in the continued work of the Chair of the BEIS Select Committee, who has repeatedly drawn attention to CAUK's recommendations in the scrutiny of the government's Net Zero plans. Similarly, one of CAUK's expert leads, Chris Stark, incorporated assembly proposals into the most recent Carbon Budget produced by the independent Climate Change Committee which he leads. A counter example - indicating the risks associated with reliance on elite champions in the context of rapid churn in leadership roles – is the failure of newly elected Chairs on other parliamentary committees that originally co-sponsored CAUK to offer substantial support or follow-through. What we observe, then, is that assemblies can generate sustained forms of political agency – distinct, and contestable, from their long-established claim to representative legitimacy – that carry on after the life of the Assembly. It is too early to say whether – and in what form – they endure through the long march of public policy.

Beyond ad hoc mobilisation, several cases also tinkered with the formal design of the climate assembly to encourage more interactive and sustained engagement between it and other political institutions. Both the French Convention and Scotland's Climate Assembly added an extra weekend a number of months after delivering their reports to allow the assembly to review government and parliamentary responses. In Scotland, the secretariat has continued after the assembly ended its formal work, with the sole function of raising awareness of the report and recommendations amongst the political class and media. Perhaps the most interesting example is the Danish assembly, which split the design into two phases in order to facilitate an iterative integration into two cycles of the existing climate planning process. Discussions are afoot as to whether to make a climate assembly a regularised occurrence as part of ongoing planning.

Discussion: Revisiting expectations of deliberative mini-publics

Our turn to practice, structured by framework drawing on insights from robust governance, has identified a range of analytical dimensions for understanding the complex process of

integrating DMPs into political and administrative contexts. The focus on real world examples has enabled us to document the variety of different approaches to designing for integration. This variety is itself an important finding as it challenges the widespread presumption that climate assemblies and DMPs, based on their shared internal design characteristics, are a stable reference object. The dimensions that we have highlighted – from type of institutional connection to extent of participant mobilisation – contain several more specific lessons for the current theory and practice of DMPs.

First, the messy complexity in the type of institutional connections of the six assemblies challenges the highly abstracted literature on integrating DMPs through "coupling" (Hendriks 2016). The term "coupling" suggests a straightforward reciprocal model between two objects, assuming that the commissioner of any DMP is also the target of outputs, and an empowered actor capable of implementing and enforcing outcomes. We see from the wave of climate assemblies that things are seldom so simple. DMPs may be situated between a commissioner and a target – as in the German case, where civil society actors commissioned the event but outputs were targeted at political parties. Or, it may be that the assembly connects to more than one institution – as in the Irish and Scottish cases, where both government and parliament played a role. Moreover, neither the commissioner nor chosen targets necessarily have autonomy to implement and enforce recommendations. Even in the French case of Presidential sponsorship, it was not in Macron's gift to simply turn recommendations into policy without the input of the legislature (which had been bypassed and excluded from engagement) – forcing a very public U-turn on a promise for unfiltered adoption that conceivably intensified mistrust in political institutions in this case. "Coupling", then, is perhaps a misnomer. Integrative design requires careful thought about how DMPs are enmeshed within a wider web of institutional relationships. The governance literature provides some guidance to understanding this multiplicity of connections, emphasising how participatory interventions must create political, executive and professional interfaces (Edelenbos et al. 2010). These distinctions resonate with our cases, but our analysis also demonstrates the importance for climate assemblies of the civil society interface, which an over-focus on integration into policy-making institutions has tended to forget.

Second, our finding that climate assemblies operated with different degrees of politicisation should recast current debates on the value of DMPs. Both supporters and critics of DMPs have pointed to their depoliticising properties, but with a different valence (Dryzek et al. 2019; Johnson 2015). Supporters have seen this as valuable in a 'polarised' political context; critics as a means to tame legitimate civil society demands. Our findings show that, when we turn our focus outwards, DMPs are not inherently depoliticising. DMPs, like other participatory processes, can operate in different modes, characterised by different relationships to conflict (Dean 2017, 2018; Vabo and Winsvold 2022). Operating in accommodation or transformation mode is a product of an array of design choices including orientation to political institutions, civil society, and the media, as well as contextual factors concerning the salience of the social conflict. Even the assemblies that operated within the more depoliticised accommodation mode often did so with distinctly political intentions, which would be missed if we simply assume that DMPs are depoliticising. For example, the critique that DMPs are an elite attempt to tame civil society is belied by the active role of civil society in these events, even commissioning the assembly in the German case. Rather than a simple, uniform story of the political robustness of climate assemblies, what emerges

from the cases is the trade-offs between different degrees of politicisation and the capacity to address different forms of social conflict. Attempting to 'scale up' via the accommodation model is largely a means for addressing vertical tensions between civil society and elite institutions by refracting their conversation through a deliberative body of citizens, but it remains predominantly a dialogue between these stakeholders. On the one hand, this makes it a trusted source of input into political institutions, but the upshot is limited interest from media and public, thus limited potential for a broader transformation of horizontal tensions within the public sphere. In contrast, attempting to 'scale up' via the transformational model is more likely to generate a direct conversation with the public on a salient political conflict and catalyse wider public debate, offering a platform for public legitimation of claims for climate action. Yet, this can come at the expense of reinforcing vertical tensions, as was evident in the French case, where much of the debate is focused on controversies around the political uptake of the recommendations by elite institutions. An appreciation of these alternative paths of integration and the design choices they entail will be key to understanding DMPs' contribution to political robustness.

Lastly, our exploration of policy robustness highlights the different ways climate assemblies have attempted to develop forms of iterative influence – whether this is through mobilisation or process design. Although a normative shift accompanying the deliberative systems turn has begun to view DMPs as simply a stage in 'deliberation-making' rather than its end-point (Curato and Böker 2016), little attention is given to what this means in practice. The emerging practices we identified here are running substantially ahead of theoretical discussion of DMPs. Our analysis shows that persistent actors can play just as an important role as institutional design in creating policy robustness. The governance literature has highlighted the important role of 'boundary spanners' in the ongoing process of negotiating between participatory innovations and policy-making authorities (see Hendriks et al. 2020; Sørensen et al 2020; and Escobar 2022). These studies, with their focus on boundary-spanning policy officials, provide useful insights for understanding the significance of insider champions in maintaining the influence of participatory inputs into policy-making (as documented in the UK case). Our findings show that, in addition, participants may themselves break out of the boundaries that have been set for them, engaging themselves in boundary-spanning activities (as in France), suggesting that, in relation to DMPs, the category of boundary-spanners may need to be extended to include new types of actor.

These boundary spanning citizens appear, however, to be in tension with standard conceptions of the legitimacy of DMPs. In the academic literature, questions of authority and authorisation – what legitimates DMPs, who do they get to speak for? – continue to be dominated by debate about democratic principles, with most DMP enthusiasts regarding the equal participation of a descriptively (or sometimes discursively) representative population sample as core to their legitimation.[3] As such, legitimacy is founded in a collective characteristic of the group, as representative of the population. Continued mobilisation thus raises some important questions as to what basis a subset of the members, or an institutional champion, can legitimately claim to speak for the assembly (and thus implicitly the public) in ongoing negotiations. Can, for example, *Les 150* continue claiming to speak on behalf of the Convention indefinitely given that all members of the

[3] For insight into this debate, see the contributions to the special issue in the *Journal of Deliberative Democracy* 16(2) discussing Cristina Lafont's *Democracy Without Shortcuts*.

Convention no longer participate equally? Any effort to sustain the impact of DMPs via integration into the complex policy process will bump into new design questions that depart from the well-worn discussion based around internal design characteristics. In other words, a consideration of the legitimacy of alternative integrative design possibilities will continue to challenge established orthodoxies of current theory.

Conclusion: Thinking robustly about democratic interventions

This article has explored the practice of the recent wave of climate assemblies to identify the integrative design concerns that shape the connections between DMPs and other political actors and institutions. Through this, we have shown the immense variety in integrative design between six ostensibly similar climate assemblies, and that this variation is important for understanding the impacts that DMPs will have on politics and policy-making. These findings have significant implications for the theory and practice of DMPs.

The examination of the integration practices of the climate assemblies draws attention to some significant lacunae and unwarranted assumptions in current thinking about DMPs. First, they challenge the image of DMPs as a uniform, off-the-shelf governance solution or one-time policymaking input, whose systemic contributions can be theorised solely from a consideration of their internal design characteristics. If we want to understand the impacts on DMPs, then we need to pay close attention to their different potential integrative design characteristics. Moreover, the complex configurations of integrative design characteristics that we observe call into question newer ideas from deliberative systems theory about 'coupling' and 'scaling up'.

Our approach has been to deploy ideas from governance theory to begin to address these theoretical issues. Most deliberative systems theory proceeds out of the concerns of normative democratic theory and we contend that governance theory contains a wealth of knowledge on the integration of participatory interventions that can enrich our analyses of how DMPs are integrated in practice. Emerging ideas about 'robust governance' (Sørensen and Ansell 2021) formed the basis of our framework, but we also point to the utility of work on 'interfacing' (Edelenbos et al. 2010) and 'boundary-spanning' (Sørensen et al. 2020; Escobar 2022). Our empirical analysis, nevertheless, demonstrates the necessary elaboration and adaptation of these ideas to the context of DMPs. We add granularity to the polity, politics and policy dimensions of robust governance theory, elaborating a number of further dimensions of integration: which part of the polity DMPs are connected to and how formal and codified those connections are; the extent to which DMPs seek to accommodate or transform interests in the media and civil society engagement; and the degree to which DMPs entail informal practices and formal processes to sustain input and scrutiny through the policy process. In addition, we suggest that conceptions of interfacing and boundary-spanning need to be extended to include respectively the civil society interface and boundary-spanning activities of participants that prove important aspects of integration in our cases.

While these insights move the field beyond over-simplified conceptions of DMPs drawn from their internal characteristics, internal design remains relevant - not just in its own right, but because it interacts with integrative design concerns. For example, different

assemblies had different approaches to coordination and facilitation that played into their degree of politicization. In particular, we see that the hands-off style of the French Convention contributed to the autonomy and later activism of *Les 150.* A task for future research, then, is not only to pay more attention to integrative design characteristics, but also to consider how they interact with different combinations of internal design characteristics to shape the impacts of DMPs on polity, politics and policy.

The integrative design concerns we identified can also inform efforts to support democratic innovation to have meaningful impact. They show the myriad design choices practitioners must consider in working towards effective integration. This includes identifying the range of actors and institutions – political, executive, professional and civil society – that a DMP connects to and creating the mechanisms to interface with them. As well as upfront intentional design strategy, the dimensions can inform *ad hoc* responses to fast-moving real-world dynamics, for example, whether to respond to emergent political conflicts in accommodation or transformation mode. Our analysis also lays bare some of the complex trade-offs involved in implementing integration – for example, accommodating interactions with stakeholders may help to reconcile tensions, but make it more difficult to attract widespread publicity and seed activism. Greater awareness of these choices, the trade-offs they entail and inadvertent consequences they risk – as well, more prosaically, the ongoing investment of resources that navigating these tensions entails – can better prepare practitioners of democratic reform for the challenges that will emerge along the way.

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