

# Citizens' Assemblies

Many governments around the world use citizens' assemblies to make difficult and long-term decisions. In a UK-wide citizens' assembly, people will be chosen randomly, like a jury, to represent all of Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and England. They will spend several weekends learning about and discussing the issue, before making fair recommendations to the government. A citizens' assembly is run by an independent specialist organisation.

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# About the Citizens' Assembly Demand

Extinction Rebellion's central demand:

**Decide Together** : We need change that is decided fairly and transparently.  
We need a Citizens' Assembly on Climate and Ecological Justice.

Why Have a Citizens' Assembly?\*

<https://www.youtube.com/embed/eov9tf8wE1M?si=fWQooMLBE5OMgY-Z>

## Learn More

A detailed explanation of XR's [Citizens' Assemblies](#) can be found on the XRUK website. It:

- Explains why our outdated system of electoral politics can't make the changes we need.
- Describes the key "four pillars" of collaboration, independence, long-term thinking, and representation.
- Introduces the concept of citizens' assemblies.
- Gives some examples of citizens' assemblies around the world and what went well.

### Increase your knowledge further

- Learn about the 3rd demand on the Rebel Academy: [Citizens' Assemblies](#)
- You can watch our [Citizens' Assemblies Talk](#) (40 minutes)
- Check out our [frequently asked CA questions](#)

## Get Involved

Find flyers to promote Citizens' Assemblies on the [Flyers page](#).

**Ask a question or suggest an improvement to these pages**

Contact us on Mattermost [UK Assemblies Reception](#) or by email at [assemblies@extinctionrebellion.uk](mailto:assemblies@extinctionrebellion.uk)

# Take Action on Citizens' Assemblies

This Action Pack is packed with ideas on how to design actions focused on Citizens' Assemblies for your group.

# Citizens' Assembly Action Pack: Start Here



Upgrading politics is a golden thread throughout XR's [Actions Strategy](#) because our failed political system is the root cause of all our climate, nature and social justice issues.

So add a positive **Citizens' Assembly** message at **every action**:

- Banners or placards with simple messages like **Citizens Assemble!**, **Citizens' Assembly**, or **Decide Together** increase name recognition and awareness of the concept of Citizens' Assemblies.
- Our [demographic bunting \(Google doc\)](#) makes a great talking point to show how we can improve politics.
- Use [leaflets \(Google doc\)](#) and mention citizens' assemblies as a way to find fair solutions.
- Consider [survey boards](#) for extra engagement.

- At any action - or outside a town hall or constituency office - make the point that our politics needs improvement.



**Check out the following pages for ideas of Citizens' Assembly themed actions!**

# Engaging with Politics

## Demographic actions: MPs don't represent us

Your council offices, town hall or MP's constituency office is a great place for an action to show how politics doesn't work.

This [demographic bunting](#) ([Google doc](#)) can start a conversation about how CA members are selected.



## Speaking to your MP about CAs

Here are some talking points for rebels going to talk to their MPs about supporting Citizens' Assemblies. The objective is to make a solid argument that CAs do not undermine the MP's power.

- CAs help to redress the serious declining levels of trust in government, parliament and politicians

Just 9% of the British public say they trust politicians to tell the truth, down from 12% in 2022. This makes them the least trusted profession in Britain. Although trust in politicians is usually low, the most recent score is the lowest for politicians since the first wave of the survey in 1983; aside from 2022 the previous low was a score of 13%, which occurred in 2009 following the expenses scandal

(Source: poll on trust in government: 2023). Levels of trust in government varies by institution:

- Political parties: 20% trust
- Parliament only: 34% trust
- UK Government: 35% trust
- Local government: 42% trust

## • People and politicians working together builds trust

Incorporating citizens' assemblies in the routine democratic procedures at different levels of government may help rebuild trust in our democracy, and, by extension, in parties and politicians. Three-quarters (75%) of the UK population reported that they trust most other people, higher than the average among the OECD countries who participated in the survey (67%). CAs are an opportunity to improve people's participation in decision making, which in turn is also likely to rebuild trust in the system.

## • Political participation

The majority (58%) of the population were not confident that people like them have a say in what the UK government does (Trust in government, UK: 2023). CAs give people a voice, especially those from groups which are usually under-represented.

## • Supports MPs taking action

No political party risks losing any votes by promising to consult the people (via a citizens' assembly) on how to tackle the climate and nature crisis. There has been little action in over 50 years.

## • Citizens' assemblies can help gain support for difficult decisions

Citizens' assemblies involve everyday people drawn from many different walks of life in the decision making process, so that the resulting recommendations are much more likely to be broadly accepted as fair and just. There are numerous examples of well-intentioned climate and ecological policies that have failed to gain widespread public support due to concerns about their unfair impact on peoples' lives:

- In France the government increased tax on petrol without considering the rural population. With little public transport, consequently the burden fell on the poorer population, which gave rise to the Gilet Jaune movement.
- In the Netherlands the government told farmers their livestock would need to decrease in numbers, leading to protests and the rise of a far right farmers political party.
- In the UK we have Low Traffic Neighbourhoods (LTNs) and London's Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) which have proven controversial.

## • Current public opinion on climate change

While two-thirds (64%) of the UK population felt that reducing the UK's contribution to climate change should be more of a priority of the government, one in ten (11%) said it should be less of a priority for the UK government. In light of this data, we can say that if people felt involved in climate-change related policies and felt that their concerns were listened to and the policies were not unfair or unjust, they would be broadly supportive of it.

## • Increasing popularity of CAs

There is growing interest in forms of direct democracy and political participation (e.g. from XR and Humanity Project). It is important to be ahead of the curve, especially to intercept the vote of those who are currently not politically active. This could be the core of a more general project to reform of our democracy (this might appeal to parties that support PR etc). It is important to be seen as a “change party” in current political climates. There are examples of CAs all over the world that have helped political decision making. For

example in Ireland the [Citizens' Assembly on Drug Use: 2022](#), [Citizens' Assembly on Biodiversity Loss: 2022](#) and the [Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality: 2020-2021](#).

# Help our political influencing campaign

XR's Political team are working to persuade MPs and candidates to support a UK-wide Citizens Assembly for Climate and Ecological Justice.

Contact us on [xr-CitizensAssembly@protonmail.com](mailto:xr-CitizensAssembly@protonmail.com) if you can help our political influencing campaign, by helping our teams in target seats ask for a Citizens Assembly for Climate and Ecological Justice. You don't need to live in a target seat to help!



# Outreach on Citizens' Assemblies

## Citizens' Assembly Stall



We'd love you to hold an outreach stall at a community event or XR action!

We can provide help and resources:

- [Leaflets \(Google doc\)](#)
- Banners and bunting
- [Demographic placards \(Google doc\)](#) with information about proportions of people around the UK (this also works well printed onto fabric and used as bunting)
- Volunteers from our CA team who can help on the day

Email us [xr-CitizensAssembly@protonmail.com](mailto:xr-CitizensAssembly@protonmail.com) to let us know your plans, and which of the resources above you are interested in!



## Idea 1: Street Talks

A street talk is a great way to engage people about Citizens' Assemblies.

This talk is designed to be given:

- by any rebel
- with no speaker training
- with minimal preparation; just read out if you don't have time to learn it
- for a group of listeners
- within a regenerative approach - pauses to breathe and allow absorption; slow down for added meaningful impact and absorption

Remember, this talk will be many people's first experience with XR, so be open, kind and respectful.

Great in conjunction with an [outreach hub](#) or an [action](#).

If you need more guidance on giving this street talk contact the [Citizens Assembly working group on Mattermost](#) or email [xr-citizensassembly@protonmail.com](mailto:xr-citizensassembly@protonmail.com).

### **Guidance for Speakers**

Download as [Google doc](#).

### **Citizens' Assembly Street Talk - 2 and 5 min versions**

Download as [Cloud OnlyOffice doc](#) or [Google doc](#).

# Idea 2: Build momentum by organising a community assembly

A community assembly in your area is a great way to build relationships at a local level, give people a taste of deliberative democracy, and grow support for a UK-wide Citizens' Assembly for Climate and Ecological Justice.

To learn more see the [community assemblies pages](#). These pages also contain a form to submit to tell us that you are planning a community assembly.

To learn more about how community assemblies work and help build support for a UK wide Citizens' Assembly you should watch the [Introduction to the Community Assemblies Escalation Plan \(90 minutes\)](#).

# Performance & Visual Actions

## Make a mini UK - from different walks of life

This action outside the Welsh parliament used shoes to represent CA participants - selected at random from many walks of life.

Have an outreach stall or survey boards nearby to hold conversations and sign people up to XR.

Use our [demographic placards](#) to visually demonstrate how a UK-wide citizens' assembly will bring together people from many different walks of life.

You could use it in conjunction with a [CA outreach event](#) or [mini talks](#).



#### Example text for an event advert/invitation:

Westminster's not working. But for many of us it's hard to imagine anything beyond our current political system. And yet, as the climate and ecological emergency worsens, the need for democratic reform becomes ever more acute. On DATE/TIME, we'll bring a sense of what a citizens' assembly sounds and feels like to VENUE. Join us to take part in a conversation about how we can upgrade our democracy. The action runs from 1pm to 3.30pm.

## Theatrical Performance- Modelling the difference between business as usual and citizens' assemblies

Near your constituency office or place of power, set up two tables, about 3m apart.

A sign in front of the first table reads: "**Politicians argue to score points and represent the interests of lobbyists.**"

Seat 2-3 people dressed in suits on both sides of the first table, representing politicians. They should argue with those seated on the opposite side of the table. 1-2 suited people stand behind them and occasionally hand them a document or note. These are lobbyists or funders, telling the politicians what they should say.

A sign in front of the second table reads: "**In a citizens' assembly, participants listen and deliberate together, and represent the interests of ordinary people.**"

Seat 5-6 people dressed normally around the second table so that they are not sitting on opposite sides. They represent assembly members, and they should respectfully listen to each person in turn, and then discuss amongst each other. A facilitator should be at the table assisting the discussion.

## Idea: A short outdoor “debate”



**On one side is an MP** (dressed in a formal suit and tie) and on the other **a Citizens' Assembly member** (in relaxed everyday clothes). Example debate below:

I am a Member of Parliament and vote on the decisions that affect your day to day life: healthcare, taxes, housing, education etc. I represent you as my party was voted into power at the last election. Being a politician is a career and I have been working towards it most of my life and I am keen to be promoted. Obviously, we are interested in making decisions that are popular so we remain in power for as long as possible. After all, I don't want to be out of a job!

I am a member of a citizens' assembly. I was selected using a system like they use for jury service and am representative of some of the people in the population in terms of where I live, age, gender, level of education etc. So I am

part of a really diverse group of people from different walks of life, people I would not normally meet. I agreed to take part because I am interested in helping to make fairer decisions that benefit us all.

Well, we're pretty representative, out of 365 Conservative MPs, 25% are female, that's not bad going! I mean, that's a quarter! 6% of our MPs are black or ethnic minorities. The vast majority of MPs went to university, some of the best universities in the country, so people can rest assured that some of the best brains are making decisions on your behalf. What more could you want?

Since over half of the population ( 51%) are women, 51% of assembly members are women and education levels range from university to none but we are all listened to and respected. The collective intelligence of a group of people from different walks of life actually make bolder and better decisions than a group of people who all think pretty much the same. What's more, we have nothing to lose.

Basically, the party provides me with briefing notes with all I need to know shortly before a vote. Our funders, bankers, lobbyists and powerful people in industry and the media help shape the position the government takes. We obviously have to keep them all onside if we want to be re-elected. I have to admit that often MPs haven't even read the notes but it doesn't really matter too much because we are told how to vote anyway, we all have to follow the party line. It's about winning the argument, keeping on top.

What's really interesting in a citizens' assembly is that we are presented with really wide ranging ideas from experts and people with lived experience, so everyone is working from the same background materials and we come to agree on the same facts leading to informed decisions rather than opinion. We have honest conversations with each other in small groups and bring our own knowledge and experience to the table, weighing up the pros, cons and trade-offs before making recommendations. It's not about winning or losing, it's about working together.

MPs are very much in touch with ordinary people. We are very aware how the cost of living crisis is affecting everyone which is why we are no longer supporting the 1.5 degree global heating target, it is just too expensive to implement.

Well, that's what I heard and believed to be true. In the citizens' assembly we have been presented with that argument, one widely covered in the media, but

we have been investigating further and I no longer agree. Further evidence we have been presented with suggests that if action is not taken now, the cost of damage is likely to be six times higher than the cost of addressing the situation now. That is just short term thinking, pushing the problem down the line for our children and future generations to deal with which is unfair. We are thinking long term for the future of us all.

# Events to improve your knowledge of Citizens' Assemblies

## Discuss our central demand at your group meeting

If you are part of a local or community group (XR or not!) why not devote a meeting to the UK-wide Citizens' Assembly on Climate and Ecological Justice?

### **Activities to engage and educate a group around Citizens' Assemblies:**

- Watch the presentation: [Why XR demands a citizens' assembly](#).
- Watch this 4 minute video: [America in one room - how a weekend of discussing politics shifted the views of these Americans](#)
- Why not plan an [outreach event](#) or a [citizens' assembly action](#) to reach more people?

## Organise a talk by a CA expert

### Invite an expert to talk at your meeting.

We have people with expert knowledge of citizens' assemblies and our central demand who can be booked to give a talk.

Ideally we need more than 20 participants - so join with other nearby groups (XR or not!) If possible we'll come in person, but we're always happy to present and answer questions over Zoom.

Contact us at [xr-CitizensAssembly@protonmail.com](mailto:xr-CitizensAssembly@protonmail.com). Tell us the dates, times, location (if in person). It's a half hour presentation with time for follow up questions.



# Got an idea for a CA action?

## Need help?

We can:

- Help with banners
- Send a CA expert to help you answer the more difficult questions
- Talk to your XR meeting about CAs

If any of the above sounds like it would be of help, get in touch via [xr-](#)

[CitizensAssembly@protonmail.com](mailto:CitizensAssembly@protonmail.com)

Also feel free to send us photos of your action, and tell us how you got on!

# Tips for talking about Citizens' Assemblies

Guidance on effective communication of CAs

# Weaving Citizen's Assembly Messaging into Actions

It's easier to talk about our central demand when we're doing an action or outreach specifically about Citizens' Assemblies.

But it's important that we talk about our central demand in as many of our actions as possible!

**We can talk about our central demand in (nearly) all our messaging.**

**Similarly we can promote our central demand when messaging around Actions, Campaigns and events in the news.**

Running a campaign about Dirty Water? Talk about people being outraged by this situation, and how a Citizens' Assembly would demand a better system.

Joining with other movements to march for Peace? Talk about how wide public opposition for war is, and that a more representative democracy wouldn't have consented to it.

## Key Ideas

- Through our demands, XRUK is not saying what should be done to address the climate and ecological emergency - we are saying that the people should decide on what steps need to be taken, and how these should be rolled out to ensure that people are not unfairly impacted.
- Citizens' assemblies are proven to result in decisions that are informed, fair, long-term and free of undue influence. And by involving ordinary people drawn from different walks of life in the process, the results are more likely to be broadly accepted and to be seen to be in the best interests of the majority, rather than the few.
- A citizens' assembly can be run to address any issue of broad public concern, so no matter what issue we are highlighting through our messaging, in nearly every case we can meaningfully be calling for a citizens' assembly.

## Why CAs are great! The 4 pillars of CAs

Existing system	Citizens' assembly
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<b>Not representative or well informed:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 1st past the post system means many voters are not represented.</li> <li>- Elected MPs are generally not representative of people from diverse backgrounds.</li> <li>- MPs often vote along party lines with limited knowledge or understanding of the issues at hand</li> </ul>	<b>True Representation and well informed.</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ordinary people selected from different walks of life to represent the wider population.</li> <li>- Assembly members are informed about all sides of an issue and listen to a broad range of perspectives. They ask questions, evaluate the evidence and check facts in order to weigh up the options, discuss the trade-offs and decide together.</li> </ul>
<b>Not independent</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Influenced by party funders and vested interests</li> </ul>	<b>Independent and free from vested interests</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Individual citizens much less likely to be subject to influence</li> </ul>
<b>Based on conflict with winners and losers</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Competition and point-scoring not conducive to cross-party collaboration</li> <li>- Loudest voice often “wins” the argument</li> </ul>	<b>Truly collaborative</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Collaboration, based on respect, active listening and open and honest deliberation</li> <li>- Everyone has an equal right to be heard; there are no winners or losers</li> </ul>
<b>Short-term thinking</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The electoral cycle incentivises popular, short-term solutions that will win votes</li> <li>- Unable to deliver the long-term, radical ideas that are needed to address the climate and ecological crisis</li> </ul>	<b>Long-term radical solutions</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- CA members can think beyond the electoral cycle and propose more radical solutions</li> <li>- Collective wisdom and intelligence of a group of diverse people far outstrips homogenous grouping of elected politicians</li> <li>- Able to break through the deadlock imposed by the current system, and come up with the solutions needed.</li> </ul>

## Potential hooks for reinforcing the 4 pillars

**When** our politicians seem disconnected from the public or take decisions that ignore the interests of different groups or communities...

**We can** explain that CAs are made up of ordinary people from different walks of life (gender, age, ethnicity etc.) randomly selected like a jury. The CA is a cross section of society, a ‘mini public’, a group of people with a range of lived experiences, opinions and attitudes.

**When** parties’ paymasters and those lobbying MPs are revealed in the media...

**We can** say that the members of CAs are independent from donors and lobbyists.

**When** MPs are seen arguing and scoring political points...

**We can** say that, in contrast, CAs are a great example of collaboration, where people listen to and learn from one another, and work together to develop solutions that are fair and just.

**When** any short term policy or announcement is made designed to win votes...

**We can** say that a CA allows long term thinking and enables more radical solutions to be proposed.

## Specific examples of linking messaging to our central demand

Situation	Suggested Response
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Disillusionment with the political process and polarization of debate	CAs provide a great way to bring people together from different backgrounds and with diverse experiences, and to build bridges.
Protests from sections of society against climate policies	CAs comprise ordinary people from many walks of life and involve them in decision-making, so the results are more likely to be broadly accepted
Further Government restrictions on climate protests / actions	Rather than suppressing the voices of ordinary people, the Government should be involving them in deciding what actions society needs to take
Roll-back or watering down of climate policies	The current system is unable to commit to the long-term policies we need: it's time to let the people decide
Worsening news on the climate and ecological emergency	Our current system is failing us. It's time to let the people decide: demand a UK-wide citizens' assembly on climate and ecological justice
Examples of harm by particular sectors/industries	Citizens' assemblies are free of vested interests and can come up with solutions that benefit the many, rather than the few

Download this page as a presentation, with example social media posts.

# Avoid jargon

## Use simple, positive language

**Do say:** Selected like a jury and then sorted to reflect the population

**Don't say:** Sortition/stratified sampling

**Do say:** A group of people that reflects the diversity of our society

**Don't say:** Demographically representative

**Do say:** Informed conversation / honest conversation / finding common ground / listening to each other / learning from each other / working through differences

**Don't say:** Discussion / deliberation / debate / consultation

**Do say:** Brave / courageous (decisions)

**Don't say:** Radical

# Messaging Dos and Don'ts

## Do's and don'ts for talking about citizens' assemblies

Based on research done for a number of democracy organisations including XR. You can find more detail in [Reforming the political system - A Messaging Guide](#).

**Do say:** UK-wide citizens' assembly

**Don't say:** National citizens' assembly

Only the United Kingdom government can pass laws on the scale needed to address the crisis. The CA must include all 4 nations - Wales, Northern Ireland, Scotland and England.

**Do say:** Publicity and upfront agreement on what will happen with the recommendations

**Don't say:** Legally binding

To hold a legally binding CA would require an Act of Parliament taking several years. In any case, there is no such thing as legally binding as a future government can always change things. Much more important is public understanding and pressure.

**Do say:** Different walks of life

**Don't say:** All walks of life

Although a CA is very diverse, we couldn't possibly include every walk of life!

**Do say:** Politics / political system

**Don't say:** Democracy / democratic

Democracy has positive connotations for many people, whereas politics does not. The root cause of our problem is the political system, not the politicians. Most people don't want to get rid of our democratic system.

**Do say:** The system is old fashioned / Victorian / needs updating / upgrading

**Don't say:** Democracy is broken

People have some pride in the UK's democratic history and don't agree that democracy is broken. However, they agree that there is plenty of room for improvement to make it fit the 21st century. Talking about updating or upgrading makes it clear that the system is designed by human beings and can be changed.

**Do say:** Who will do right by us

**Don't say:** Who will make the best decision

'Best decision' makes us consider qualifications and competence - that decisions should be left to politicians and elites. "Who will do right by us" implies honesty, sincerity, and who has our best interests at heart. Politicians can't compete with the public in this way, as trust in politicians is so

low.

**Do say:** We all have a right to contribute to decisions

**Don't say:** The public are shut out of decisions

Many people say that the opportunity to vote, lobby your MP and stand for election are examples of how ordinary people take part in politics. However, elections are only every few years and we could contribute much more.

**Do say:** We, us

**Don't say:** The public, they

We are the public! Don't separate our interests and experiences from those of the public.

**Do say:** People like us

'People like us' is a sticky phrase that people recall.

**Do say:** Teachers, doctors, scientists, shopkeepers. People from different walks of life

Specifying these groups reminds us that we already trust people from our communities with important decisions.

**Do say:** Like a jury, we all have an equal chance of being selected

**Don't say:** Random selection

'Random selection' tends to cue 'randoms' i.e. odd, untrustworthy people. In comparison, a jury is understood and trusted by the public.

# Challenge the normal

Most people (outside of groups like XR!) follow what they think is 'normal' behaviour. These 'social norms' are therefore powerful obstacles to change.

**Dynamic normative messages** emphasise changing trends - to encourage people to become part of the new normal.

This means we can get stuck in our campaign to only motivate a few people, while the majority do not change. Even if we try to tell them that the new behaviour is 'normal', their everyday experiences will probably indicate that this is untrue.

Dynamic normative messages in our communication may help. **The idea is to create a 'new' normal that can coexist with the 'old' normal**, which encourages people to change their behaviour without feeling they're operating outside of social norms.

An example of a this would be; *"In the past few years, an increasing number of countries have started to use citizens' assemblies and even more are experimenting"*.

This may be much better than a static message like *"Ireland uses citizens' assemblies"*.

**A dynamic message emphasises a new, changing trend. A static message states that the new trend has already occurred, and it is this statement that can conflict with people's experiences - and thus cause them to doubt that there is actually a new normal!**

As Brett Henning says in his TED talk [What if we replaced politicians with randomly selected people](#) there's too many citizens' assemblies to count!

# Harder questions and answers

## Become an expert CA communicator!

You will be asked lots of questions about CAs. Here are answers to help you, and some sample answers for spokespeople.

### 1. We already have politicians that have been elected, why do we need citizens' assemblies as well?

Governments have had over 40 years to act on this emergency but they have not done nearly enough. The current political system is unable to come up with the radical, long term solutions that are needed in the face of the Climate and Nature Emergency. So we need a different way of finding solutions.

The emergency can't be solved by one or several political parties, which in our current system are focused on competing and winning elections. We need the whole country to unite behind the significant changes which will have to be made in our economy and society. The assembly can support the politicians by advising on what ordinary citizens think should be done for the benefit of the whole country. It will not be biased by political ideology nor influenced by lobbying from fossil fuel companies. **A UK-wide citizen's assembly can help enhance representation for the general population.**

Sample answer - The reality is that the current political system hasn't been able to tackle the climate emergency to the extent that we need. CAs are a way to help politicians make the decisions that are needed. It's about having a grown up conversation in which people are informed, they deliberate, they listen and learn, and they come up with recommendations that are solution oriented.

### 2. The average person doesn't know what they're talking about, they shouldn't be allowed to make decisions

By the end of the citizens' assembly process participants will know a lot more than the average MP about the issues involved. They will have seen multiple presentations from experts and had the chance to ask questions. **Learning is a central part of the process.**

There will also have been facilitated discussion amongst participants and the time to reflect. Remember that our Members of Parliament are rarely experts on many of the issues they are faced with. **MPs are often too busy to get to grips with something at a level of true understanding.**

Past CAs have shown that ordinary citizens are perfectly able to understand complex issues and can come up with fair and just solutions that work for the common good.

Sample answer - Many of our current cabinet are looking after portfolios that they have zero experience in. It's unlikely they would get jobs in the fields that they are tasked with overseeing... so in this light it's not fair to say the average person knows nothing... A key aspect of CAs is ensuring that participants have adequate knowledge and understanding of the issues being discussed. That is why learning is placed at the forefront of proceedings. As John Long, who was a member of the Irish CA said, "we're probably the best informed amateurs in the country on this topic at the moment."

### 3. Isn't this just mob rule?

Citizens' Assemblies are certainly no mob - they're a balanced group of people who are given the space, time and support they need to come up with well-reasoned recommendations. They will be discussing and working with each other around tables in a collaborative manner. They won't rule anything, they will provide recommendations.

It's worth reflecting that currently we have rule by media barons, rich donors, and lobby groups, who have too much influence and power over politicians and political parties. Citizens' assemblies will cut through all that by being open and transparent.

Sample answer - It's not a mob, it's an informed group selected by sortition. It's not rule - it's recommendations. Mob rule is a 'knee jerk reaction', uniformed and not calmly considered, and often a result of frustration. CAs are about bringing disparate and wide-ranging views to the table in a collaborative process to find common ground. Citizens assemblies are carefully curated, they have well established protocols in how they are run.

### 4. These assemblies will be dominated by retired busy-bodies and loud people

The selection process (known as **sortition**) is specifically designed to ensure this doesn't happen.

The assembly membership is a representation of our society. To ensure inclusivity, people who may find it difficult to attend will be given support to make them feel able to take part.

The assembly will be run by trained facilitators to ensure that everyone gets a fair chance to speak and the meeting is run in an inclusive manner. Currently the country is run by the 1% with enormous power. In a CA, they will only represent 1% of the assembly.

Sample answer - The beauty of the CA selection process is that the final group has to be diverse, it has to broadly represent the population as a whole, and there are very careful structures and processes to ensure that one segment of the population doesn't dominate.

## 5. The recommendations will all end up being written by politically motivated interest groups. What about people like me? What about the silent majority?

The selection process ensures that people from different walks of life are present, and those people are given the opportunity to speak.

It may even be you in the assembly, but if it's not, it will be someone in a similar position to you.

The recommendations are made by the group for the good of all society - and you are part of that society! Assembly recommendations need to be fair and just - that means including everyone. The citizens' assembly process gives the reasoning and justification behind recommendations made, so we can all understand.

Sometimes there will be recommendations from the Citizens' Assembly that you don't agree with. Unfortunately that often happens in life - when was the last time you agreed with every decision a government made whilst in power? However, Citizens' Assemblies are our best chance of us arriving at a unifying decision.

Sample answer - I'm hearing that you have concern that you'll be made to do something by people you don't know. Well depending on your political persuasion you'll be living with laws and regulations that were introduced by governments that you didn't vote for. This is a normal feature of life in a democracy. The advantage of a CA is that participants will be acting for the common good ... and I would suggest that people from different walks of life, no matter their political allegiance, will be concerned about what happens if laws and regulations aren't changed to help solve this crisis.

## 6. Politicians will just ignore the results, like they always do. It'll be a waste of time and money.

Sadly politicians have a track record for ignoring experts, the people, and sensible recommendations - that's partly why we have the problems we do. Before the CA starts it is important there is an agreement made publicly with the government about how recommendations will be implemented.

It is also key that the public and politicians alike are aware of what CAs are, how they work, and why they are useful. Plus, everyone in the country must know this CA is taking place and why it is so important, as this will create public pressure. **Publicity is crucial for a successful outcome.**

In this case, if those commitments are not honoured, it will cause public outrage.

Sample answer - You know what, we share your concern. Politicians have a very poor track record in this regard. In a way, it shows why we need a citizen's assembly because politicians need help in making the right decisions. We also need a commitment from them that they will respond to the recommendations, and that they will take seriously any recommendations that have assembly support. It's our role as citizens to continue holding them to account.

## 7. What if the citizens' assembly comes back with something really stupid? Like Boaty McBoatface? Are you going to support that recommendation?

Citizens' Assemblies are a highly respected method of bringing people together, giving them the information they need and allowing them to make sensible decisions. Given the importance of the subject we have faith that our fellow citizens will take these meetings very seriously.

There have already been numerous CAs on climate that have come up with good, serious recommendations.

There may be recommendations that XR or some of its members don't agree with. In that case we will have to abide with the recommendations of the assembly - that's democracy. But a CA is much better than the politics we've got!

Sample answer - One of the main reasons XR is in favour of CAs is because they are a highly effective way to engage people in a process where the collective intelligence of the group comes to the forefront. The research on CAs and deliberative processes in general confirms this. Therefore we have confidence and trust in our fellow citizens' ability to come up with recommendations that are fair and just, and developed with the best interest of the common good at their core.

## 8. Is XR trying to change the government? I thought they were interested in climate change?

The CA will provide recommendations to the existing political system, they are not seeking to replace it. A CA enhances the system.

Sample answer - Our concern is climate change and the ecological emergency, the impact it is having on the planet and the world's population. Our demands do not include nor require a change of government. What XR wants is for the people to be involved in making the decisions that are going to have major effects on their own lives. The way to do this, we believe, is through a UK-wide Citizens' Assembly on Climate and Ecological Justice.

## 9. Our current system isn't perfect but it does get things done. We shouldn't interfere - better the devil you know

Our current system is stuck and the clock is ticking. Scientists tell us that we need to take action, and quickly. If our current system was working we would be seeing real action on the CEE.

We change things all the time in our democracies and in our lives - law, regulations, committees and bureaucracy. We believe this change may make a big difference. The political system as we have it today also has not been around forever - change is happening all the time.

Sample answer - What springs to mind is the saying 'If it ain't broke, don't fix it.' The problem is that it is broken, certainly in respect of the climate and ecological emergency we are facing. The science is overwhelming - this is a life or death issue. We're not suggesting replacing the current system but we are suggesting improving it. In business one of the maxims is 'never a right way, never a wrong way, always a better way', so we're talking here about making changes for the better. And you know we change things all the time, particularly in the field of human health and wellbeing- we went from smoking in pubs to not smoking in pubs, we went from not wearing seatbelts in cars to making them compulsory, once upon a time people could drink and drive - now it's a serious offence, so we make changes all the time, it is a constant of everyday life. All we're asking for is a change here that will allow us to find the solutions we need.

## 10. What sort of things are recommended by these assemblies?

Previous CAs on climate like the ones in France, the UK, and Scotland have come up with concrete recommendations, some of which are mentioned below.

France:

- Develop alternative modes of transport other than the private car
- To adopt an ecocide law

Climate Assembly UK:

- Call for government leadership – working across political parties
- Independent, neutral monitoring and reporting on net zero progress
- Much more transparency in the relationship between big energy companies and the government, due to concerns over lobbying and influence
- Get to net zero without pushing our emissions elsewhere in the world
- A robust media strategy on the outcomes of the assembly

Scotland's Climate Assembly:

- Tax high carbon resources
- Retrofit all existing homes by 2030
- Decarbonise heating by 2030
- Public transport cheaper or free

## 11. What you're proposing is anti-democratic, these people aren't elected.

Citizens' Assemblies are a type of deliberative democracy, which is one of the earliest forms of democracy practised in ancient Greece, regarded by many as the birthplace of democracy.

The word democracy means 'people rule', democracy doesn't mean elections. It means deciding together, which can be done through a CA.

Sample answer - I'm really glad you raised that, because this is such an important point. The idea that citizens' assemblies are anti-democratic doesn't stack up when we look at the history of democracy. Randomly sorted (sortition) deliberative democracy was one of the earliest forms of democracy used in ancient Greece, which is considered the birthplace of democracy. It's just that we're not familiar with this form of democracy because most democratic systems use a form of representative democracy, electoral politics as we know it. It is rule by the people, for the people. What we have now is rule by representatives of the people, but they do not necessarily represent the people at all. Most of us didn't even vote for them. It's a mistake to equate 'elections' to democracy. Democracy is much more than that and needs engagement of the people, not just once every so many years at the ballot box.

## 12. Would the CA be legally binding, will the recommendations be required by law to be implemented?

The recommendations forthcoming from a CA are not currently legally binding, because this would involve change in law - a process that is long and counterproductive at this moment in time.

There must be an upfront agreement on what the government will do with the recommendations and explain any recommendations they don't implement.

In the end pressure from the public will be the a major influencing factor on persuading government to take up the recommendations.

## 13. After the CA is over, who checks that something actually happens with the recommendations?

- An oversight body composed of members of the CA could and should be created to monitor the government's progress. This oversight body should be decided on during the CA
- The media
- The people

## 14. The citizens in the CA aren't elected so they are not accountable, so is it morally right that they should be allowed to make these decisions?

The issue of accountability is an important one. Let's be clear though, citizens are making recommendations in an effort to solve a crisis. Is it morally right to let things go on as they are?

Politicians are clearly not being held accountable in our current system either. Given the behaviour and track record of many politicians when they enter office, it is clear that the power of the ballot box is far more limited than people believe. **If accountability were truly present in our public life, we wouldn't be in this mess.** Election promises are consistently broken and changed.

Learn More

[Learn More](#)

# Basic Standards for Organising Citizens' Assemblies

These standards are from [Citizens' Assemblies - a guide to democracy that works](#) by Marcin Gerwin.

## **1. Random selection of participants**

All members of a citizens' assembly are selected by lot. Ideally, every member of the population eligible to take part in a citizens' assembly should be able to potentially receive an invitation to participate.

## **2. Demographic representation**

The composition of a citizens' assembly should broadly match the demographic profile of the community participating in the process. A set of criteria may be used to ensure demographic representativeness of the group, like age, gender, geographic area, or others. The aim is to create a community in a small scale that "feels like us". The size of the group should allow for inclusion of a wide diversity of views. A stipend should be provided to all participants to the amount that would at least cover the costs of attending the citizens' assembly.

## **3. Independent coordination**

The citizens' assembly is run by an independent team of coordinators, which is responsible especially for preparing the process of random selection, developing the agenda, and inviting experts and facilitators. If the citizens' assembly is organized by local authorities or the parliament, it is important that all members of the coordination team are not part of the civil service. The coordinators should be impartial, e.g. not active politicians or direct stakeholders.

## **4. Citizens' assembly can invite experts**

Despite the programme being prepared by the team of coordinators, the citizens' assembly can invite additional experts of their own choice. This may be in the form of a speech in person, a video streaming, a recording, a written note or other.

## **5. Inclusion of a widest practical range of perspectives**

If there are diverse solutions and perspectives on a subject, ideally all of them should be presented during the educational phase of the citizens' assembly (by expert speakers). A method of combining perspectives due to a limited time or other practical considerations may be applied.

Presentations may have the form of a speech in person, a video streaming, a recording, a written note or other.

## **6. Inviting all stakeholders**

Any organisation, informal group or an institution whose area of work and expertise is related to the topic of the citizens' assembly has the right to present its opinion to the citizens' assembly in person. The role of the team of coordinators is only to identify the stakeholders – they don't make a selection. Due to limited time and a large number of stakeholders, a method of choosing their representatives may be used. In this case, a diversity of perspectives should be taken into account.

## **7. Deliberation**

Discussions which include listening to others mindfully and weighing options are the key elements of a citizens' assembly. The programme should involve discussions in small groups as well as in the plenary in order to maximize opportunities to speak and to be heard. The deliberation phase should be run by skilled facilitators.

## **8. Openness**

All members of society should be able to provide input to the citizens' assembly in the form of comments, proposals or suggestions.

## **9. Sufficient time for reflection**

Providing a sufficient amount of time for reflection is necessary to achieve well-thought-out decisions. If the matter is not urgent, it is best not to rush. The citizens' assembly should be able to prolong its meetings – their length and number – if it chooses to do so (subject to budgetary limits).

## **10. Impact**

The follow-up to the citizens' assembly's recommendations should be clear from the outset. Ideally, recommendations that receive the support of the citizens' assembly at an agreed threshold should be treated as binding (to such an extent that is legally permissible in the given situation).

## **11. Transparency**

All presentations during the educational, plenary phase should be transmitted live and recorded. All materials presented to the citizens' assembly should be made available online. Clear information about how recommendations of the citizens' assembly will be implemented should be provided online and updated as actions occur. A report presenting details of methodology used for organizing a citizens' assembly should be provided by the coordination team.

## **12. Visibility**

Each citizens' assembly is an important event in the life of a community and citizens should be informed that it is happening and information on how they can get involved and follow it should be provided. The citizens' assembly should be publicly announced before it is formed.

[Learn More](#)

# Quotes About Citizens' Assemblies

## From Ireland's Citizens' Assembly:

'I think this issue in Ireland could never have gotten to the point we're at today were it not for the CA. I think we would have been years getting there, if we ever got there.' *Kate O'Donnell (serving member of Fine Gael)*

"So I would say we probably put a couple of hundred hours of total time into it which is probably more than any parliamentary party committee would have put into it. So we're probably the best informed amateurs in the country on this topic at the moment." *John Long 56*

"The CA was very respectful and very congenial to everybody's opinion. So there were no major arguments or disputes here at the CA." *John Long 56*

"It's not just a particular type of people and they've gone to college and they've studied something and they're all making views in it. You get to hear what the ordinary people, the people that it affects on the ground, how they feel about something. What they would like to change about it and then go about it in a political manner after gaining all of the information." *Noreen O'Flynn*

"If you are cynical about your politician's ability to change legislation, pass legislation or come up with legislation but if there's an issue that's burning to your society in general - have an assembly." *David Keogh*

## From the French Citizens' Climate Convention:

"I understand that people busy to try to feed their family don't care about #climate policies but each of us can contribute to our future. Democracy means each of us can speak up. We were not controlled by experts or the governance committee." *Agny*

"We saw the weight of lobbies. I'm an electrician. If I set your house on fire, would you hire me again? Why do we let powerful industries pollute the planet? I'm disappointed." *Grégory*

"The problem is trust. We had the #greatnationaldebate the #conventioncitoyenne... When are we going to listen to citizens? We believe in this. Can we make our society better. I want to open the debate. We need to talk about this with our representatives" *Samyr*

"The #conventioncitoyenne does not end tonight. The door is just opening. See you soon"  
(paraphrased quote) *Sylvie*

"The #conventioncitoyenne gives me a lot of hope, it's the only way we can address the emergency of #climatechange" *Mohamed*

[Learn More](#)

# Other Organisations and Further Reading

As a starting point you can find loads more information from XRUK's Citizens' Assembly Working Group (CAWG) on the [XRUK Website](#).

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**Democracy Next:** Checkout their [Assembling an Assembly Guide](#) for a really good explanation of how an assembly works.

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## **KNOCA - Knowledge Network on Climate Assemblies**

A European network for sharing best practice on the design and implementation of Climate Assemblies. Tracks climate assemblies across the world, and organises workshops on best practice. Workshops are recorded and available to view on their website.

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**Climate assemblies-emerging trends challenges and opportunities:** KNOCA report that draws lessons from the recent wave of climate assemblies and considers how they can improve their impact.

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**Sortition Foundation** provides citizens' assembly services, and also have a proposal for the House of Lords to be replaced by a [House of Citizens](#).

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**Involve** works to make public participation and deliberation an everyday part of our democracy, and help solve the big challenges of our time.

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**Zero Hour** campaigns for the Climate & Nature Bill — a plan for the UK to do its bit in keeping global warming down to 1.5°C and reversing biodiversity loss by 2030. The bill includes a Citizens Assembly on Climate and Nature.

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**Manuel Arriga** - expert on Citizens' Assemblies and author of **Rebooting Democracy: A Citizen's Guide to Reinventing Politics**. He also created a series of **youtube videos** for XR including "What is a Citizens' Assembly?", "Why is Extinction Rebellion calling for a Citizens' Assembly?", and "How do Citizens' Assemblies relate to the global climate emergency?"

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**When Citizens Assemble video (16mins)**: Ireland's efforts to break a political deadlock over its de facto ban on abortion inspired a bold response - the creation of a Citizens' Assembly to tackle on the issue. During five weekends spread over five months, a random selection of Irish people deliberated on the highly divisive and controversial issue. Their conclusion, in April 2017, recommended a radical liberalisation of existing laws, including a change to the Constitution.

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**The People vs. Climate Change**: BBC Documentary on government committees' commissioning an assembly on achieving net zero by 2050.

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**The People's Plan for Nature**: the outcome of a Citizen's Assembly on Nature convened by by National Trust, WWF & the RSPB.

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**Scotland's Climate Assembly**: an assembly of 106 citizens, who met online over seven weekends between November 2020 and March 2021 to deliberate on information provided by experts and produce a set of recommendations, addressing the question 'How should Scotland change to tackle the climate emergency in an effective and fair way?'

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**UK Parliament Debate** about the use of Citizens' Assemblies (Jan 2020)

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This **Children's Assembly on Biodiversity** called on Ireland to 'treat the Earth like family'.

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**Luxembourg 'step up' green energy and efficiency targets** partly due to citizens' assembly.

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**The COP26 Global Assembly** produced a report answering the question 'How can humanity address the climate and ecological crisis in a fair and effective way?' Interestingly, the findings of the report came from both a Global Citizens' Assembly, and self-organised Community Assemblies around the world.

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Reforming The Political System **Messaging Guide**.

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'When Citizens Decide: Lessons from Citizens' Assemblies on Electoral Reform' - Patrick Fournier, Henk van der Kolk, R. Kenneth Carty, André Blais & Jonathan Rose.

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**Participedia:** A global network and crowdsourcing platform for researchers, educators, practitioners, policymakers, activists, and anyone interested in public participation and democratic innovations.

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**Reflecting on interacting with a government-led Climate Citizens Assembly:** XR Scotland's Political Engagement Circle Italks about Lessons to learn to ensure inclusivity, fairness, transparency and more.