A Citizens’ Assembly for Northern Ireland

What is it? How will it work?

Tim Hughes
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A Citizens’ Assembly for Northern Ireland?

Agenda

1. What is a Citizens’ Assembly?
2. How will it work?
3. What might it consider?
A Citizens’ Assembly for Northern Ireland?
Who’s behind it?

- Age Sector Platform
- Association of Charitable Foundations
- Community Development & Health Network
- Community Foundation for Northern Ireland
- Corrymeela
- Building Change Trust
- Building Communities Resource Centre
- Electoral Reform Society
- Imagine Belfast Festival
- Integrated Education Fund
- Involve
- NI Open Government Network
- Queen’s University Belfast
- Solonian Democracy Institute (Ireland)
- Ulster University
- Women’s Aid Federation NI
What is a Citizens’ Assembly?

Randomly selected

Deliberative
A Citizens’ Assembly for Northern Ireland?
How would it work?

• 50-100 randomly selected Northern Irish citizens
• Two weekends
• Expert facilitation
• Learning, deliberation & decision making
Why a Citizens’ Assembly?

1. Tackling contested issues
2. Breaking deadlock
3. In-depth engagement
4. Building citizenship
5. Rebuilding trust
Citizens’ Assembly on Brexit
Assembly members

50 citizens, broadly representative of UK voters

- Age
- Ethnicity
- Gender
- Region
- Social class
- Vote at referendum
Citizens’ Assembly on Brexit

Format

Two weekends in September

1. Learning
2. Deliberation
3. Decision making

Expert facilitation
Speakers

Dr. Roslyn Fuller – Solonian Democracy Institute

Jamie Pow – Queen’s University Belfast
By yourself:

1. Consider what you’ve just heard
2. Think about any questions you would ask
Q&A

At your table:

1. Discuss what you’ve just heard
2. Agree one question to ask the speakers
A Citizens’ Assembly for Northern Ireland? What could it be on?

Criteria
1. Political processes have failed to find a solution;
2. Reasonable likelihood of reaching recommendations;
3. Political support;
4. Popular support;
5. Model transferrable to other issues;
6. Likelihood of political and media attention

1. Deadlock at Stormont (e.g. The Petition of Concern; Communal designation in the assembly; Bill of rights; Electoral system; etc.)
2. Academic selection
3. Anti-poverty strategy
4. Brexit (e.g. the border, environmental protection, etc.)
5. Climate change
6. Health and social care reform
7. Age of criminal responsibility
A Citizens’ Assembly for Northern Ireland?
What could it be on?

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Build a pyramid
First preference
Second preferences
Third preferences
Thank you!

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Democracy Day 2018
Roots of Deliberation

Dr. Roslyn Fuller
Solonian Democracy Institute
Deliberative Democrats
THERE'S LIKE, TOO MUCH INSANE

IN YOUR MEMBRANE, MAN
Original Democrats
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Modern</th>
<th>Ancient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pace</td>
<td>Glacial</td>
<td>Fast &amp; flexible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Numbers</td>
<td>Fraction of a percentage of the total population</td>
<td>Ca. 15-20% of citizen population</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selection</td>
<td>Careful selection via polling agency</td>
<td>First come, first serve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pay</td>
<td>Sometimes, approx. equivalent to jury service</td>
<td>Always, approx. equivalent to jury service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experts/Speakers</td>
<td>Selected by organisers</td>
<td>Self-selecting, but ability and previous record important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Infrequent</td>
<td>Continuous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concept</td>
<td>Privilege</td>
<td>Duty</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Stasis
A CITIZENS’ ASSEMBLY FOR NORTHERN IRELAND: WHAT DO PEOPLE THINK?

John Garry, Queen’s University Belfast
Jamie Pow, Queen’s University Belfast; jpow01@qub.ac.uk
John Coakley, Queen’s University Belfast & University College Dublin
David Farrell, University College Dublin
Brendan O’Leary, University of Pennsylvania
James Tilley, University of Oxford

Democracy Day 2018
Do people support the idea?

Survey lead-in:

On some important issues – such as flag display and the issue of welfare reform – the political parties in Northern Ireland find it very hard to agree with each other, and this leads to political crises. When such a crisis happens, there may be a number of ways to try and resolve it. Please tell me to what extent you think each of the following approaches is a good idea or a bad idea.
Do people support the idea?

Survey lead-in:

On some important issues – such as flag display and the issue of welfare reform – the political parties in Northern Ireland find it very hard to agree with each other, and this leads to political crises. When such a crisis happens, there may be a number of ways to try and resolve it. Please tell me to what extent you think each of the following approaches is a good idea or a bad idea.

Approaches:

1. Party Talks (BG)
2. Party Talks (Intl)
3. Election
4. Direct Rule
5. Referendum
6. Citizens’ Assembly
Do people support the idea?

Vignette describing a citizens’ assembly:

Another possible way of resolving a difficult issue – such as flag display or the issue of welfare reform – would be to get a group of ordinary people to make a decision on it after they have had a chance to consider the evidence and arguments. Here's how it would work... A representative sample of 500 ordinary citizens in Northern Ireland is selected to consider the issue. These people would be selected in the same way that people are selected to serve on a jury: they are randomly selected. And they would be a cross-section of all of the people in Northern Ireland in terms of age, gender, social class and religious and community background. The people on this ‘Citizens Assembly’ would be provided with background information about the issue and would be given a presentation of all the main arguments on both sides of the issue. They would be asked to think carefully about the evidence and the different views and would then be asked to vote on the issue. What a majority of these people decided in the vote would be seen as the decision on the issue and would be implemented. What do you think of this possible way of making decisions on difficult issues?
Do people support the idea?

Level of Support

Party Talks (British Govt)  Party Talks (Intl Diplomat)  Election  Direct Rule  Referendum  Citizens’ Assembly

$n = 1,015$
Do people support the idea?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Citizens’ Assembly</th>
<th>Party Talks (British Govt)</th>
<th>Referendum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ethno-national moderation</td>
<td>.15** (.07)</td>
<td>.05 (.06)</td>
<td>.00 (.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distant from all parties</td>
<td>.03 (.12)</td>
<td>-.12 (.11)</td>
<td>.02 (.12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust both communities</td>
<td>.22** (.09)</td>
<td>.01 (.08)</td>
<td>.00 (.08)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>3.425*** (.26)</td>
<td>3.70*** (.24)</td>
<td>2.99*** (.25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted R-square</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>801</td>
<td>790</td>
<td>782</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

DV = ascending level of support for each decision-making option; models control for age, sex, social grade and religion; *p < .10; **p < .05; ***p < .01
Are citizens seen as competent enough?

In general, how good or bad do you think ordinary people would be at making decisions if they were selected to serve on a Citizens’ Assembly?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither good nor bad</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Public % taken from representative sample (n = 1,015); MLA % taken from a sample of 42. Surveys conducted by Ipsos-Mori in 2015
Whose interests would they serve?

In a Citizens’ Assembly, do you think ordinary people would try to come to a decision that is good for everyone in Northern Ireland, or would they just try to look after the interests of their own community, or just try to look after their own personal interests?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>% Public</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>… good for everyone in Northern Ireland</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>… just try to look after the interests of their own community</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>… just look after their own personal interests</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Public % taken from representative sample (n = 1,015); MLA % taken from a sample of 42. Surveys conducted by Ipsos-Mori in 2015.
What power should it have?

*If a Citizens’ Assembly of this kind was introduced do you think it should...*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>% Public</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>… make the final decision</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>… make a recommendation</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>… not be given any role</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Public % taken from representative sample (n = 1,015); MLA % taken from a sample of 42. Surveys conducted by Ipsos-Mori in 2015
Would people accept CA decisions?

Attitude towards Irish Language Act

Support

Oppose

Irish Language Act will not be introduced via...

Irish Language Act will be introduced via...

Do you accept the decision?

Party Talks (BG)
Party Talks (Intl)
Election
Direct Rule
Referendum
Citizens’ Assembly

Everyone gets something they don’t like!
Would people accept CA decisions?

<n=1,800>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>% Accept Decision</th>
<th>% Not Accept Decision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Party Talks (British Govt)</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party Talks (Intl Diplomat)</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Election</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct Rule</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referendum</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizens’ Assembly</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusions

• There is a high aggregate level of support for the idea of a citizens’ assembly as a response to political crisis.
• Ordinary people are regarded as broadly competent, reasonably other-regarding, and capable of making recommendations.
• Support is meaningful: people are just as likely to accept a personally objectionable decision taken by a citizens’ assembly compared to most other mechanisms.
• Exception: referendum – decisions particularly supported by those proclaiming stronger ethno-national ideologies.
Further Research & Practice

• Deliberative Minipublic on Brexit held in February 2018 (organised by QUB/Ipsos-MORI, sponsored by ESRC). Keep an eye on https://www.qub.ac.uk/sites/brexitni/ for report & data

• Research on citizens’ assembly design underway; results to follow soon
Thank You

Any questions?
What topic do you think the Citizens' Assembly should consider?

- Deadlock at Stormont: 31
- Academic selection: 16
- Anti-poverty strategy: 19
- Brexit: 16
- Climate change: 8
- Health and social care reform: 24
- Age of criminal responsibility: 4
Any points for the advisory group to consider?

- Irish language act
- How Petitions of Concern work - rules around them
- Minimum voting age reduced to 16
- Universal basic income
- That the Irish language is outside the political spectrum
- Weighted voting to reflect 1st, 2nd preferences etc.
- Where could the assembly make greatest impact?
- Narrowing Stormont question to Irish language
- Participation of BME, refugee & asylum seeker population at citizens assembly
Any points for the advisory group to consider?

Minimum age to be in Citizens’ Assembly?

Don’t shy away from language and culture!

Housing & homelessness should be identified as part of poverty

Are we not already using the principles of citizens assembly in our democracy (Media/ experts/pooling companies)?

Reducing age of voting to 16!

Voting age from 16 to 16, need to educate 16 years old so they are not pulled along by adults and forced to think one way

CA to include people with disabilities and LGBTQ. Democractic invigoration. Mandatory voting, votes at 16, youth assembly.

No 1 choice was political reform but how would we get our politicians to agree to this?

A topic to conside: gender equality like for instance the gender pay gap. Make sure women’s voices are heard.
Any points for the advisory group to consider?

- Include stratification in random, and give additional emphasis to people with barriers to equal engagement. Less middle age white men.
- How do we strike a balance between realism and idealism? What about the personality dynamics in groups? How rationally based are changes in.
- Focus on the large political question to potentially break deadlock. Other questions require refinement.
- Ask Siri, Watson and Alexa and see what they suggest.
- How can we get an citizen’s assembly on Deadlock at Stormont when it is the thing politicians won’t want?? How to get around this paradox?
- Nothing else can be achieved until the deadlock at Stormont is resolved.

Pick a topic that is not overly broad and complex. Consider 40/40 balance of unionist/nationalist when selecting citizen assembly to avoid.