

<b>Institution:</b> University of Southampton		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 19 Politics and International Relations		
<b>Title of case study:</b> 19-03 Participation and Democratic Innovations: Pioneering Citizens' Assemblies as a New Way of Doing Democracy in Britain		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2014 – 2020		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>
Will Jennings	Professor of Political Science & Public Policy	April 2012 – present
Gerry Stoker	Professor of Governance	January 2007 – present
John Boswell	Associate Professor in Politics	June 2013 – present
Matt Ryan	Lecturer in Governance & Public Policy	July 2009 – present
Paolo Spada	Lecturer in Comparative Politics & Methodology	August 2015 – July 2016 & September 2019 – present
Ingi Iusmen	Lecturer in Governance and Policy	July 2013 – present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> October 2015 – July 2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> N		

## 1. Summary of the impact

Researchers at the University of Southampton (UoS) have promoted Citizens' Assemblies as a novel means of injecting citizens' voices into political decision-making in Britain. This impact is not linked to narrow or specific policy outcomes, but to a more fundamental influence on expanding the ways in which democratic politics operates and policy gets made.

- Immediate impacts on how Britain's political institutions operate: drawing directly on the methodology of successful pilots run by teams at Southampton and Sheffield in 2015, and the follow-up Citizens' Assembly on Brexit, policymakers have commissioned Citizens' Assemblies on a range of topics, including adult social care, climate change (via Select Committees of UK Parliament), town regeneration, traffic congestion, and air quality (via Local Authorities).
- Long-term impacts on public debate about the future of British democracy: UoS research has influenced ongoing constitutional debate, where Citizens' Assemblies are at the forefront of discussion about new ways of doing democracy, with support from high-profile actors across the political spectrum.

## 2. Underpinning research

Deepening citizen participation in political decision-making is an area of long-standing excellence at UoS. Since 2014, UoS researchers have drawn on this knowledge base to help pilot the use of Citizens' Assemblies – institutional innovations that bring together 30 to 150 randomly selected citizens as a cross-section of the population to learn about an issue, discuss its dimensions, and develop solutions. The research, conducted in collaboration with other field leaders in the theory and practice of democratic innovation, represents their first ever use in British democracy.

The pioneering project 'Democracy Matters' (DM) was a pilot study funded by an ESRC Urgency Grant in 2015 [G1]. It brought together a consortium of academics and third sector partners to run and analyse two assemblies at regional level: *Assembly North*, based in Sheffield, and *Assembly South*, based in Southampton. A large team from UoS was involved in designing and conducting the research: Jennings was Co-I; Spada managed Assembly South; Ryan and Boswell were consultants; Stoker sat on the steering committee.

The successful pilot generated a broader programme of research into the potential uses and ongoing challenges of Citizens' Assemblies in the British context. Notable projects in this novel agenda have included: the Citizen's Assembly on Brexit (CAB) in which Jennings was a team member alongside collaborators on the DM project from UCL and the University of Westminster [3.1, 3.2]; studies of further experimental uses of Citizens' Assemblies in the work of public bodies [3.3]; and methodological innovations in evaluating Citizens' Assemblies [3.4].

## Impact case study (REF3)

Overall, this body of research has produced two key findings:

- i. *Citizens' Assemblies are a viable model for engaging British citizens in policymaking* [3.5]: This finding, centred around methodological innovations in cross-referencing the British Election Study and population statistics to stratify recruitment of participants for DM and CAB, demonstrates how it is possible to bring together a representative cross-section of the British public to deliberate on policy issues. This provided crucial reassurance to public institutions that Citizens' Assemblies can be designed with the ideological and demographic diversity needed for their recommendations to genuinely reflect the (informed) views of the wider public. The research has also demonstrated citizens are able to deliberate constructively on issues that are complex and politically contentious.
- ii. *Citizens' Assemblies offer a means to bridge the gap between elites and citizens* [3.6, 3.1]: This finding, based on data gathered in DM, CAB and similar innovations, reveals the mutual learning and respect between elites and publics that can occur through deliberation. This has given political elites greater trust in the process and encouraged a growing number of elite champions for the use of Citizens' Assemblies as a tool in political decision-making in Britain.

## 3. References to the research

- 3.1 Alan Renwick, Sarah Allan, Will Jennings, Rebecca McKee, Meg Russell, and Graham Smith (2017). *The Report of the Citizens' Assembly on Brexit*. <https://citizensassembly.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Citizens-Assembly-on-Brexit-Report.pdf>
- 3.2 Alan Renwick, Sarah Allan, Will Jennings, Rebecca McKee, Meg Russell, and Graham Smith. (2018). 'What kind of Brexit do voters want? Lessons from the Citizens' Assembly on Brexit.' *The Political Quarterly* 89(4): 649-658. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-923X.12523>
- 3.3 Ingi Iusmen and John Boswell. (2016). 'The dilemmas of pursuing 'throughput legitimacy' through participatory mechanisms.' *West European Politics* 40(2): 459-478. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2016.1206380>
- 3.4 Paolo Spada and Matt Ryan. (2017). 'The failure to examine failures in democratic innovation.' *PS: Political Science & Politics* 50(3): 772-778. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096517000579>
- 3.5 Matthew Flinders, Katie Ghose, Will Jennings, Edward Molloy, Brenton Prosser, Alan Renwick, Graham Smith and Paolo Spada. (2016). *Democracy Matters: Lessons from the 2015 Citizens' Assemblies on English Devolution*. <https://citizensassembly.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Democracy-Matters-2015-Citizens-Assemblies-Report.pdf>
- 3.6 Brenton Prosser, Alan Renwick, Arianna Giovannini, Mark Sandford, Matthew Flinders, Will Jennings, Graham Smith, Paolo Spada, Gerry Stoker, and Katie Ghose. (2017). 'Citizen participation and changing governance: cases of devolution in England.' *Policy & Politics* 45(2): 251-269. <https://doi.org/10.1332/030557317X14895974141213>

## Grants

**G1** ESRC Urgency Grant: 'Democracy Matters: A Constitutional Assembly for the UK - A Comparative Study and Pilot Project'. August 2015 to August 2016.

## 4. Details of the impact

### a. Immediate impact on how Britain's political institutions operate

This research has pioneered a new model of citizen engagement in political institutions in Britain. It has helped build the capacity, expertise and evidence that is enabling the increasingly widespread adoption of Citizens' Assemblies at national and local level. As such it has informed and influenced practice, and built political and public trust, in deliberative methods.

#### i. National level

Jennings provided advice on the development and design of the Citizens' Assembly on Social Care (CASC): the first ever Citizens' Assembly to be commissioned by UK Parliament. The idea behind CASC was directly inspired by the methodology developed for CAB (which itself had built on DM). CASC was organised by Involve, the UK's leading participation charity and Jennings' methodological input on recruitment processes and criteria was essential to capturing a diversity of political opinion at the outset of the process. Lead organizer for Involve Sarah Allan explained: "CASC resulted from a series of meetings that begun with a request from a parliamentary official to find out more about the methodology used for the Citizens' Assembly on Brexit (CAB). The

*recruitment design for CASC drew heavily on the one that Will Jennings and the team at UCL used for CAB. We used the same overall strategy (a stratified random sample through an online survey company) and similar materials. We consulted Professor Will Jennings prior to starting the CASC recruitment. This included advice on stratification and survey questions.” [5.1]* Director of Involve, Tim Hughes notes more generally “there is a lot of input that Will gave around the sampling that has informed a lot of our practice in subsequent assemblies” [5.1].

The genuine diversity of the assembly members gave MPs confidence in the process, such that they cited the recommendations CASC over 20 times in their committee report – for example in establishing the principles that the funding solution should ensure high quality care, should be fair and should join up reform processes for working age adults and older people [5.2]. Clive Betts MP, the chair of the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee which co-sponsored CASC explained: *“We have listened carefully to the assembly members’ views. They have been vital in informing our thinking, and are reflected throughout our report.” [5.2]*.

Building on the success of CASC, from September 2019 to September 2020, Involve led delivery of Climate Assembly UK, a citizens’ assembly commissioned by six Select Committees of the UK House of Commons [5.3]. While the recruitment design of the assembly differed from CAB and CASC, Involve again consulted Jennings prior to starting recruitment to obtain advice around recruitment criteria [5.1]. Involve’s Senior Project Officer on CASC and Project Lead on Climate Assembly UK, Rebecca McKee considers that *“These consultations were incredibly useful and helped us ensure the assemblies were representative of the general public.” [5.1]* McKee also reflects that *“Our collaboration on the previous Citizens’ Assembly on Brexit, and insights it gave us on the issues we needed to address during recruitment, was essential to the success of the assemblies we [Involve] ran for UK parliament.” [5.1]*

Debating the assembly recommendations, MPs placed significant emphasis on the importance of its membership being representative: *“It is important to recognise the value of assembling a group that is truly representative of the UK population...”* (Lilian Greenwood MP), *“The fact that it was representative of the country at large meant that we got a set of recommendations with a lot of common sense that were not dogmatic...”* (David Johnston MP), *“I was impressed by the set-up: how assembly members had been selected, and the huge amount of work and expense that went into trying to ensure it was representative and reflective of the general population”* (Kerry McCarthy MP) [5.9]. In response to the recommendations, Kwasi Kwarteng (Minister for Business, Energy and Clean Growth) noted *“public engagement of this kind ... is absolutely necessary”* in developing policies on climate change. As such, Jennings’ methodological insights and experience gained through DM and CAB shaped directly the use and design of citizens’ assemblies by UK Parliament on issues of major societal importance.

This programme of research has thus built capacity and expertise in deliberative approaches to democracy. Darren Hughes, Chief Executive of the Electoral Reform Society (ERS), a partner on both DM and CAB, suggests *“The experience ... contributed to our involvement with government-backed projects – ERS staff were invited to help steer the Citizens’ Assembly of Scotland, and formally invited to contribute to citizens’ assembly processes in Wales. We have drawn on our experience of Democracy Matters and the CAB in major reports, including Westminster Beyond Brexit.” [5.4]* Insights from the research has therefore filtered out across the policy-making process of wider UK governance.

## ii. Local and regional level

Citizens’ Assemblies are integral to the *Innovation in Democracy Programme* launched by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport in 2018. The programme, which enables Local Authorities (LAs) to bid for funding of up to £60,000 to run a Citizens’ Assembly on a complex policy issue, explicitly draws on DM as a key case study to model future processes on [5.5], as well as drawing heavily on expertise from the delivery partner in CAB, Involve (who significantly developed their capacity and expertise on citizens’ assemblies through partnership with the academic team). Over 70 LAs expressed interest in the programme, and Citizens’ Assemblies commissioned either through it or independently have thus far taken place in Dudley, Brent, Greater Cambridge, Test Valley, Oxford, Kingston upon Thames and Camden. UoS researchers remain involved in knowledge exchange in these local experiments – Ryan, for instance, was an advisor to the Brent CA and Boswell is evaluating the

Kingston upon Thames CA. Assembly North from the Democracy Matters project is identified as a case study for Citizens' Assemblies by the Local Government Association.

### **b. Long-term impact on public debate on the future of British democracy**

This research has also had significant impact on public debate on the future of British democracy, offering a vehicle to bridge the gap between political elites and citizens.

#### i. Political support

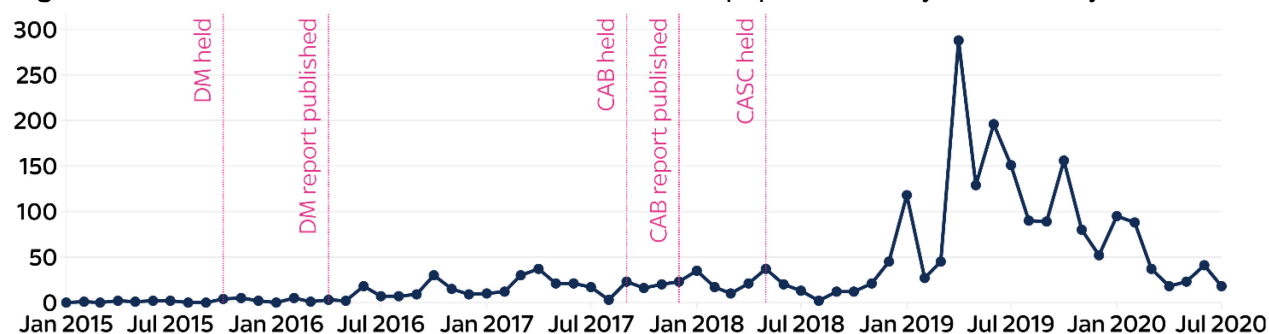
The DM pilot won the UK Political Studies Association's *Democratic Innovation of the Year* prize in 2016, having secured support from across the political spectrum as a model for a new way of doing democracy [5.6]. At the launch of its final report, the project received endorsements by politicians from seven parties [5.7]. Jonathan Edwards MP (Plaid Cymru) described it as "a major step forward in increasing public engagement in how the peoples of the UK are governed", while Suzanne Evans (UKIP Parliamentary Spokesperson) noted "Citizens' Assemblies are a great first step towards embedding new forms of political engagement at both a local and a national level" [5.7]. Caroline Lucas MP (Green Party) observed: "People are increasingly fed up with Britain's archaic and undemocratic political system. It's clear that our constitution needs updating – but that process must not be the sole responsibility of people in power. This project is hugely exciting because it aims to devolve power to local communities, and allow people a real say on the issues which affect their lives" [5.7]. DM was highlighted specifically by the House of Lords Committee on the Constitution and the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Reform, Decentralisation and Devolution as an example of *how* to enhance public engagement in resolving constitutional issues [5.7].

CAB similarly received substantial cross-party support and from across the Brexit divide [5.8]. It is testament to the methodological rigour of recruitment of the assembly (ensuring it was politically as well as demographically representative) that its membership composition did not become a subject of internal or external contention. Indeed, Tim Hughes of Involve has said "I don't think the social care one [CASC] would have happened without the Brexit one having happened": CAB gave the parliamentary clerks and chairs "confidence that this has been done before, that there is a clear process that is tried and tested" [5.1]. Growing political interest in and support for Citizens' Assemblies is reflected in the sharp growth of their discussion in UK Parliament since 2015 [5.9].

#### ii. Media coverage

DM gained a media profile due to its novelty, especially in a lengthy BBC News Online feature based on Assembly South [5.9]. Following the proof of concept this research has offered, Citizens' Assemblies have entered mainstream debate about mending British democracy amid a climate of growing division and distrust. Research from DM and CAB has been regularly cited in media reports and prominent opinion columns calling for use of Citizens' Assemblies in British democracy, and by political figures like MPs Lisa Nandy and Stella Creasy advocating a 'circuit breaker' for the constitutional impasse over Brexit [5.9]. UoS researchers have also played an active role in engaging in this public discussion: Jennings was interviewed for the BBC News Online feature on DM [5.9]; and Boswell was interviewed about his research for a BBC Radio 4 Analysis programme devoted to Citizens' Assemblies [5.9].

**Figure 1.** Mentions of Citizens' Assemblies in UK newspapers, January 2015 to July 2020



Systematic analysis of coverage of Citizens' Assemblies by UK news media (via Nexis) reveals they have received increasing levels of coverage since 2015 (see Figure 1) [5.9]. There is evidence, therefore, that Citizens' Assemblies are increasingly an accepted tool in democratic



governance and this movement can be traced to the DM project and subsequent learning and spill-over from assemblies that followed.

### iii. Civic activism

More recently, activist groups have shown interest in Citizens' Assemblies as a tool for ensuring a public voice in political decision-making. Governments holding a Citizens' Assembly on climate and ecological justice is one of three major demands of the global environmental movement, Extinction Rebellion (XR). The DM project is cited in the XR Guide to Citizens' Assemblies [5.10]. Members of the consortium behind DM, CAB and CASC – including Ryan – act as advisors to local chapters, and the group's manifesto directly references the DM and CAB reports [5.10]. Our collaborations via DM and CAB with third sector partners – ERS and Involve – have more broadly showcased Citizens' Assemblies as a tool for enhancing democratic politics. Darren Hughes of ERS says *“We have used the examples of the Democracy Matters project and Citizens' Assembly on Brexit countless times – showing how deliberative approaches to democracy can counter toxic polarisation and bring people together”* [5.4]. DM and CAB (and CASC) are heavily referenced in the 2019 House of Lords Library briefing on Citizens' Assemblies [5.11]. As such, this programme of research has significantly informed understanding of Citizens' Assemblies as a tool of public engagement and public policy.

Hughes also says *“The pioneering DM and CAB projects helped show that innovative forms of democratic participation were possible in the UK – and have proven to be been vital resources of learning and promotional tools since”* [5.4]. McKee says *“More widely, the work that Involve did with academic partners such as Will Jennings and his collaborators allowed it to extend and strengthen its use of citizens' assemblies – thanks to a clear evidence base on the implications of the design of the recruitment process”* [5.1]. DM and CAB have thus made an important general contribution through enhancing the toolkit of democratic governance in the UK.

## 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

**5.1** Testimonials from Involve: Sarah Allan (7 July 2020), Rebecca McKee (8 July 2020) and interview with Tim Hughes (15 January 2020).

**5.2** Health and Social Care and Housing, Communities and Local Government Committees (2017). Long-term funding for adult social care. London: House of Commons. Available at: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmcomloc/768/768.pdf>

**5.3** House of Commons. 2019. 'Select Committees announce plans for Citizens' Assembly', 20 June 2019. <https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/365/business-energy-and-industrial-strategy-committee/news/96965/select-committees-announce-plans-for-citizens-assembly/>

**5.4** Testimonial from Electoral Reform Society (Hughes), received by email 28 July 2020.

**5.5** Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government; Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport. (2018). Innovation in Democracy Programme Evidence Pack.

**5.6** Political Studies Association Award for Democracy Matters (2016): <https://www.psa.ac.uk/political-scientists-and-electoral-reform-society-win-democratic-innovation-award-%E2%80%98oscars>

**5.7** Testimonials available via <https://citizensassembly.co.uk/democracy-matters/about>

**5.8** Testimonials available via <https://citizensassembly.co.uk/brexit/about/#endorsements>.

**5.9** Media and parliamentary coverage of Citizens' Assemblies.

**5.10** Extinction Rebellion (2019). Guide to Citizens' Assemblies. Available at: <https://rebellion.earth/wp/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/The-Extinction-Rebellion-Guide-to-Citizens-Assemblies-Version-1.1-25-June-2019.pdf>

**5.11** House of Lords Library. 2019. Citizens' Assemblies: An Introductory Guide. <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/LLN-2019-0017/LLN-2019-0017.pdf>