

## RIFS-Blogpost

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[Discussion at the Citizens' Assembly for Democracy in Leipzig.](#)

**The Coordination Unit for Citizens' Assemblies in the German parliament is to be disbanded. President of the German Parliament, Julia Klöckner, has justified this decision by arguing that citizens' assemblies diminish the power of**

**! Zum Aktualisieren der Textelemente, Zitation markieren und dann F9 drücken !**

**Zitation:** [Löw-Beer, David] (2026): [Citizens' Assemblies Strengthen Parliaments] – RIFS-Blogpost, [27.11.2025].

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**parliament. However, research at the Institute for Sustainability (RIFS) leads us to a different conclusion: citizens' assemblies can provide crucial orientation precisely where political decision-making processes have become bogged down by seemingly insurmountable contradictions.**

Our research on democratic governance and practice has involved accompanying numerous citizens' assemblies and conducting interviews with citizens, administrative staff, and political decision-makers. We have found that citizens' assemblies, as advisory, fact-oriented bodies, expand the scope of action for political actors – they do not restrict it, as Ms. Klöckner suggests.

Citizens' assemblies operate in a formalised, quality-assured, and dialogue-based manner. Randomly selected citizens engage in an intensive exploration of an issue, listening to both experts and affected parties, and developing recommendations based on their deliberations. These recommendations are proposals, not decisions – decision-making authority rightly remains with parliament, as citizens' assemblies lack the democratic legitimacy for binding decisions.

Politicians have repeatedly reported that dialogue-based citizen participation provides insights that could not be obtained through surveys and media coverage – for example, identifying issues that truly matter to people in everyday life and gauging potential majority support for solutions within a diverse, representative group.

An often-cited example of this potential is the Irish Constitutional Convention (2012-2014), which was made up of randomly selected citizens (two-thirds) and politicians (one third). During a period of declining public trust, the Convention successfully prepared far-reaching constitutional reforms – for example on marriage and abortion rights. While stable parliamentary majorities existed,



agreements had previously failed due to expectations of massive public resistance (Suiter, Farrell & Harris, 2016). The Convention thus demonstrably contributed to strengthening democratic processes.

Other research findings also strongly support citizens' assemblies, as they:

- Increase awareness of problems and improve the quality of political debates.
- Provide opportunities for participants to experience democratic agency.
- Build bridges between diverse perspectives.
- Provide parliament and government with indications of social majorities that often remain invisible in traditional consultation or lobbying processes.

**The bottom line:** Citizens' assemblies do not represent a loss of power for parliament, but rather a democratic addition with a clearly defined role. They contribute to orientation, legitimacy, and expanded scope for action in times of social polarisation.

Find out more about citizens' assemblies and our research in our dossier [Deliberative Mini-Publics](#).