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Contents

Foreword

The 21st century is marked by complex global challenges—from the climate emergency and the rise of disruptive technologies to pandemics, growing inequalities, and threats to democracy. These problems transcend national borders and demand coordinated, inclusive, and legitimate responses at a planetary scale. However, existing international institutions—especially the United Nations system—often operate far removed from the voices and daily experiences of the world's population. At a time when trust in multilateralism and traditional democratic processes is eroding, it is increasingly urgent to imagine and experiment with new forms of citizen participation in global governance.

It is in this context that the concept of Global Citizens' Assembly (GCA) has emerged as an innovative proposal. Grounded in the random selection of participants representative of humanity's diversity, and built on informed and respectful deliberation, GCAs seek to expand opportunities for listening and for citizen influence on issues that affect all of humankind. More than mere consultations, these assemblies offer a structured space for the collective construction of recommendations and shared visions for the future.

Citizen participation has been a central pillar of my administration in the city of Francisco Morato, which is part of the metropolitan region of São Paulo in Brazil. This principle guided our actions between 2017 and 2020, and was deepened during my second term as mayor from 2021 to 2024. Through a Participatory Multi-Year Plan, over four years we shaped and implemented public policies in alignment with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals and grounded them in the perceptions and real needs of the population in their local communities. In the face of the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, we carried out the 2021–2024 Participatory Multi-Year Plan remotely, ensuring broad and effective public participation.

It was in this same spirit that the Francisco Morato Citizens' Assembly was born—a new and promising form of democratic participation that strengthens transparency and expands the role of the population in shaping the city's future. The active presence of invited and randomly selected residents, who

are given the proper conditions to participate and deliberate, demonstrates not only a commitment to public oversight, but also the full realization of citizenship—of the power of citizens in decisions that affect their present and future. Intentionality is the word that must be amplified through the Citizens' Assembly: we must be fully present and committed in that space.

Building on such experiences, this document is a vital contribution to the global debate on how to institutionalize GCAs, particularly within the framework of the United Nations. It systematizes principles, models, and possible pathways to make GCAs a reality, addressing logistical and financial questions, risks of co-optation, and the potential for meaningful political impact.

The report also situates GCAs within a broader ecosystem of democratic innovations, alongside instruments such as a UN Parliamentary Assembly or a World Citizens' Initiative. Rather than proposing a single formula, this report offers both a conceptual and practical compass to guide governments, international organizations, civil society, and philanthropy in strengthening global citizen participation.

Above all, conceptualizing and implementing GCAs is a part of democratic imagination and innovation—drawing on the power of dreaming and intending to collectively build a more just, inclusive, and effective global governance system. May this report inspire leaders and communities to take concrete steps along this path.

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Mayor Renata Sene
(2017–2021 and 2022–2024)
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Executive Summary

Building on the experience with citizens' assemblies thus far, this report examines implementing the concept as a democratic innovation aimed at fostering direct citizen input in global governance. By involving individual citizens in deliberation on global challenges—such as climate change, artificial intelligence, health crises, or the global governance architecture itself—Global Citizens' Assemblies (GCAs) are anticipated to serve as platforms for putting forward policy recommendations from diverse perspectives that aim to pursue the global common good. At the same time, they are laboratories for societal learning, global discussion and citizens' empowerment.

In principle, GCAs can be set up by intergovernmental organizations and clubs, governments, civil society groups, and a variety of other stakeholders as forums convened to address specific issues at critical moments or as permanent bodies that become a regular feature of global governance. A proof of concept to draw upon is the 2021 Global Assembly on the Climate and Ecological Crisis.

GCAs, as citizens' assemblies in general, need to rely on important design features, including random selection of participants to form a representative sample of the population, informed and reflective deliberation, and transparent procedures. Implementation at the global scale makes it necessary to address specific challenges related to selection of participants (also known as Assembly Members), linguistic and cultural diversity, logistical effort, risk of political and corporate influence and others. This report finds that none of these issues appear insurmountable. It highlights, however, that there needs to be clarity about what GCAs are, what they are not, and what they can and cannot achieve.

This report encourages the use of GCAs by different actors and in different settings without making recommendations or expressing preferences on how this should be done. We envision that ultimately there will be a dynamic ecosystem making use of this deliberative format. However, the report particularly discusses the potential for GCAs to be set up by and benefit the UN. As a tool to be used by the UN, this paper recommends that the UN General Assembly (UNGA) applies Article 22 of the UN Charter to

establish a dedicated permanent framework to codify procedures and operations, increase efficiency and create synergies. The report recommends that this UN framework should enable UN bodies and entities to set up and operate different ad hoc GCAs as needed.

GCAs are positioned as complementary to other initiatives in the field, such as creating a UN Parliamentary Assembly or a UN World Citizens' Initiative. They offer a specific pathway for global public deliberation and participation and bridging the gap between citizens and global decision-makers.

While GCAs face practical limitations due to the world's diversity and scale, they offer a valuable opportunity to foster trust in multilateral institutions and empower citizens to have a voice in global policy-making. By enhancing inclusive deliberation and putting forward actionable outcomes, GCAs have the potential to improve the democratic character of global governance and promote more responsive, citizen-centered approaches to solving planetary challenges.

1. Introduction

The idea of GCAs is gaining traction as a democratic innovation for tackling transnational challenges. As global governance and global institutions face criticism for their lack of legitimacy, inclusivity and responsiveness, GCAs are put forward as a mechanism to bring diverse voices into deliberations on issues that affect humanity as a whole. These assemblies are founded on the principles of informed deliberation and serve as a forum for reflection, dialogue, and collective wisdom that transcends global barriers of geography, culture, or social status which otherwise can be dominant.

The concept of GCAs has long been proposed by democratic theorists. They suggest that citizens' assemblies can have a transformative potential, arguing that these forums can depolarize views, foster empathy, and encourage long-term thinking, enabling participants to craft forward-looking and effective policies. Citizens' assemblies have also been shown to break political deadlocks by creating space for mutual understanding and compromise. When coupled with extensive outreach to the public, their influence extends beyond a given assembly, generating societal learning and nurturing considered discussion on critical topics (see Reuchamps et al., 2023).

The publishers of this study, Democracy International and Democracy Without Borders, are committed to advancing tangible proposals for improving the democratic character of global governance. Among other things, they are co-convenors (with CIVICUS) of the "We The Peoples" campaign for inclusive and accountable global governance. GCAs are sometimes asserted to be uniquely positioned to facilitate citizen input at the global scale, a goal that deserves strong support. While there are various forms of deliberative and participatory mini-publics, the purpose of this particular paper is to provide an overview and assessment of a global implementation of citizens' assemblies, based on random selection and demographic representativeness, with a focus on the UN.

2. The case for citizens' assemblies in global governance

Global decision-making is primarily structured around the governments of nation-states. While many of them are not democratic to begin with, like those rated "not free" by Freedom House (2025), numerous countries around the world are affected by a trend of autocratization, democratic backsliding, a decline in the quality of democracy or decreasing trust in the performance of democratic institutions. According to International IDEA's Global State of Democracy Report, countries with declines are found at all levels of performance and across the world's regions. (International IDEA, 2024). The decline of democracy at the national level strongly affects the quality of democratic representation and participation at the global level, too. However, addressing the challenges to democracy at the national level alone will not suffice to make global governance more democratic, because of issues that are inherent to the global level.

The advancement of an increasingly globalized economy as well as challenges on a planetary scale, such as climate change or violent conflict, marked by the participation of non-state actors, has brought with it the need for more effective global governance and a transfer of state competencies to the transnational level. This evolution has not been matched with the logically expected introduction of democratic instruments at the trans-national level, leading to a democratic deficit that arguably limits citizens' agency and participation on critical issues. As more countries experience democratic challenges, the ability of international institutions to function in an effective, responsive and people-centered manner is further undermined.

In the past decade, citizens' assemblies have emerged as a popular inno-vation to address the perceived gap between citizens and the state. Simply put, citizens' assemblies are forums for citizen deliberation where partici-pants are selected through sortition and thus broadly representative of the underlying population as best as possible while reflecting its diversity. These forums are designed to realize the virtues of inclusiveness, reflective think-ing, open-mindedness, and informed discussion – virtues that are much needed today to break political deadlocks and facilitate complex decision-making.

Among the best known examples of citizens' assemblies at the national level are the Irish Citizens' Assembly on abortion and same-sex marriage, which demonstrated the power of citizen deliberation in bridging a deeply divided society (Farrell & Suiter, 2021) as well as the French Citizens' Convention for Climate (Convention Citoyenne pour le Climat) commissioned by President Emmanuel Macron in response to the Yellow Vest protests (Galván Labrador & Zografos, 2024), and transnationally the Conference on the Future of Europe.

There has been increasing interest in scaling up the successes of citizens' assemblies at the local, national, and supranational levels to a global scale. What started as a proposition by political theorists and practitioners (cf. Dryzek et al., 2011; Vergne et al., 2018; Dryzek et al., 2019; Vlerick, 2020) has become a mechanism advocated across the political spectrum based on a shared view that giving everyday citizens an opportunity to be involved in public deliberation and work on political recommendations creates more inclusive institutions that make better decisions.

In 2021, the world's first Global Assembly on the Climate and Ecological Crisis demonstrated a proof of concept. 100 randomly selected people from around the world were willing and able to deliberate for 68 hours over 11 weeks to generate a People's Declaration in time for the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in Glasgow. A follow-up Global Assembly for People and Planet will accompany the 2025 COP30 in Brazil.

3. Citizens' assemblies: core design features and applications

Citizens' assemblies are based on the notion that people, in principle, should have a voice in crafting the laws that govern their lives. Rooted in the theory and practice of deliberative democracy, advocates of citizens' assemblies argue that the legitimacy of collective decisions is also linked with the right, capacity, and opportunity of those affected to participate in meaningful deliberation (Dryzek et al., 2019). Through the mechanism of random selection and stratification based on demographic markers of the general population and taking into consideration discursive diversity, they are uniquely positioned to accommodate inclusive deliberation representing differing economic, cultural and social groups engaged in informed, respectful, and reflective discussions to reach common ground.[1] Their focus on mutual, prolonged deliberation makes them predisposed to generate compromises that can be deemed as widely acceptable to various segments of the population. The opposite of deliberation in the literature is debate: debate is about winning an argument whereas deliberation is about being open to changing one's mind and collaborating with interlocutors.

3.1. Creation and topic selection

In principle, a citizens' assembly could be created by any actor looking to include the voices of those affected by a given decision-making process. For the purpose of this paper, we will limit the discussion to citizens' assemblies that intend to help create public policy, through the involvement of citizens (or residents or populations affected by the decision). Typically, a citizens' assembly is called for by the legislative or executive branch at different levels of government, who determines the topic, the scope and the political follow-up to the assembly process. In recent years, this role has also been taken on by civil society groups, who collaborate to varying degrees with authorities. On the one hand, the quality of a citizens' assembly may benefit from stringently defining the matter at hand and the mandate of the

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1 For a definition and guiding principles, see also FIDE & newDemocracy, 2024.

citizens' assembly. For example "climate change" or "limiting the emission of greenhouse gasses." On the other, this will naturally limit the scope of discussion, which suggests that in each case a reasonable balance has to be found. Finally, the product of the assembly and the follow-up action that it will inspire are crucial and should be clear from the get-go as well as the possibility to pursue various elements feeding into the topic—for instance, can the assembly suggest changes to related legislation, to the constitution or to taxation rules. Often assemblies deliver a report of recommendations to the commissioning authority, but in certain cases (some of) the recommendations are addressed to the population as a whole, as was the case, for example, in Ireland with the referenda on Marriage Equality (2015), Abortion (2018), Blasphemy (2018), the Role of Women in the Home (2024).

3.2. Sortition

Assembly members are selected via a civic lottery, typically (though not always) in two stages. First, random invitations are made, often through the use of official population registers or random-dialing of phone numbers. Demographic and (less commonly) attitudinal data is collected from those who accept. Then, a stratified random sample is chosen to reflect the broader population on key characteristics. These can be age, gender, occupation, socio-economic factors, etc. Advocates argue that this method ensures fairness and inclusiveness, as everyone has an equal random chance to be selected, and contributes diverse perspectives to decision-making. This method reduces the bias through self-selection that troubles other forms of participation. Participants often do receive stipends and support (e.g., travel, lodging, childcare) to reduce economic and practical barriers to participation to further ensure broad and fair representation.

3.3. Informed deliberation

Members have access to expert evidence and stakeholder input. It is a key question as to who selects which experts as their input strongly shapes the learning phase and contributes to the perspectives the members of an assembly will consider and adopt. In order to ensure balanced and unbiased expert input, mechanisms should be in place that allow participants to request additional speakers. Members engage in a mix of plenary sessions

and small-group discussions, often with facilitators in order to enable the fair participation of all in the discussion. Unlike petitions or polls, citizens' assemblies require sustained engagement, often several days over longer periods. In practice, some items under consideration will only be deliberated on in small subgroups which then put forward their recommendations to the plenary. The plenary will not necessarily investigate them further but vote on them as is. While this does not differ greatly from parliamentary procedures, it could be argued that in such a process, the outcome may not be particularly representative or legitimate from the perspective of deliberation which the assemblies are supposed to advance (Courant, 2021). This is why individual assembly members in principle should be given an opportunity to respond and revise recommendations before a plenary vote. To address this, the French Citizens' Convention on the End of Life introduced equal speaking time and space in the final recommendations to the minority opinion, similar as with legal rulings (Ehsassi & Landemore, 2023).

3.4. Collective recommendations

Members co-create a set of recommendations and/or a collective statement, often explaining their reasoning and any unresolved differences. Depending on a given assembly's purpose, authorities that commissioned the assembly are expected to respond to and act on these recommendations. They might lead to direct implementation through the respective authority, though more often they are followed up with debate and a vote in the relevant or commissioning legislative body. In assemblies organized by civil society, the outputs may be used for campaigns targeting policymakers and the public. The intended use and impact of recommendations ideally should be made clear to the participants at the outset of the assembly in order to manage expectations. Citizens' assemblies do not have legislative powers themselves. While their members in the case of proper implementation are representatively selected based on demographic characteristics, they do not have a legislative mandate and they are not politically accountable to anyone. As "principal-agent links" are essential for legitimate decision-making, the role of citizens' assemblies needs to be a consultative one (Parkinson, 2006: 84). We can imagine scenarios in which a citizens' assembly plays a complementary role vis-à-vis the representative chamber in the legislative process.

3.5. Ad hoc versus permanent

A key question regarding citizens' assemblies is whether they are called into being ad hoc to address a specific topic and cease to exist after they deliver their recommendations or whether they are a permanent structure, following fixed cycles and firmly embedded into a given decision-making process.

Ad hoc assemblies may have the benefit that they can react to "hot-button" topics that are considered politically sensitive. They can guide the legislature in defusing a debate which is marked by strongly polarized opinions and otherwise deadlocked. Examples are the Convention for the Climate Change organized in France as a result of the Yellow Vests protests, the citizens' jury on assisted dying in the UK and the French Convention on the End of Life. In order to manage expectations of the assembly participants and to have efficient discussions, it is crucial for an ad hoc assembly that its scope and process are clearly defined before starting.

Permanent assemblies however are an integral part of political decision-making in a certain constituency and can act as a complementary chamber to the legislature. In this model, the assembly could take place at regular intervals, the topic is decided by the assembly itself (or a committee of it), and all or part of the members of the assembly are regularly replaced with new randomly selected participants. Often these assemblies also have an evaluation mechanism in place to assess the action taken on previous recommendations at a set time, typically 12 or 18 months, after the conclusion of a specific round of deliberation. A prime example is the permanent citizens' assembly in the German-speaking region of East Belgium, where the permanent assembly has taken up topics of housing, integration and health, incidentally (during the Covid-19 pandemic).

Mixed models exist where ad hoc assemblies are embedded within an institutional framework and can be triggered in specific circumstances. The EU Commission's 2023-2025 Citizens' Panels are an example of this.

3.6. Applications

Citizens' assemblies have been applied at various levels and on diverse topics, from tackling hate crimes in the London Borough of Waltham Forest to shaping policies on sanitation in Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina,

creating livelihood programs in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region, Southern Philippines or the civil society-organized Convention of the Future Armenian. The Conference on the Future of Europe, which convened 800 participants in 2022/23, also demonstrated that pan-European citizens' assemblies are practically feasible, in particular by instituting ample mechanisms for translation and other assistance to alleviate challenges in multicultural and multilingual deliberation (Cordier, 2025). An earlier example, carried out from 2008 to 2010, was EuroPolis which studied the effects of deliberation on political engagement (however, while it shared similarities with the format of citizens' assembly such as random selection and deliberation, it did not aim to produce collective recommendations for policymakers).

Like all institutions and instruments, citizens assemblies too run the risk of instrumentalization for political and other reasons. In particular their democratic value depends greatly on the context they operate in. With regard to authoritarian states such as China, Baogang He (2023: 296) found that local forms of citizens' deliberation, which includes local village assemblies, are a "critical part" of the authoritarian political system "designed to gain legitimacy, discipline citizens, and ensure regime survival and resilience." Still, from the perspective of citizens, partial empowerment is still better than none, he noted (id.: 307). Though it should be cautioned that there is no consensus on the value of the trade-off between potentially affecting change and authoritarian co-option.

4. Global Citizens' Assemblies: an overview

Global Citizens' Assemblies aim to enhance the democratic character of global governance by fostering public participation in international deliberation on pressing, planetary challenges. GCAs offer a platform for developing more inclusive and responsive global policies and build on the assumption that there is a broader global interest in the global common good that trumps individual nation-states' narrower, self-serving goals (Legendre, 2024). Dryzek, Bächtiger, and Milewicz (2011) argue that citizen deliberation in general often results in long-term, forward-looking proposals.

The current international system, particularly the UN, has been struggling to deliver effective global cooperation. At the root of this dysfunction is the UN's institutional design, where 193 self-interested nation-states negotiate in ways that often obstruct solutions to global problems (Vlerick, 2020). Consensus requirements in international negotiations lead to lowest common denominator outcomes, a dynamic that has been described as the "tragedy of international law" (Leinen & Bummel, 2024: 196).

A key example of GCAs' potential lies in addressing climate change (cf. Knops & Vrydagh, 2023). While reducing greenhouse gas emissions benefits all nations in the long run, many countries prioritize short-term political and economic gains by avoiding the costs of emission reduction as free riders (Vlerick, 2020) – a classic tragedy of the commons. It is being argued that a GCA could develop global policies that prioritize the long-term interests of all stakeholders, curbing free-riding by actors focused on short-term economic benefits (id.). Such policies would presumably also strengthen governments' and international organizations' capacity for action regarding their climate commitments.

As it stands, there is an assumption that connecting GCA processes to official intergovernmental negotiations on climate policy would help advance broadly carried action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and implement mitigation efforts, while ensuring a fair and just transition for all and strengthening long term resilience to other shocks. This expectation is largely underpinned by the policies set out by previous assemblies on climate such as the experimental Global Assembly on Climate and the

Ecological Crisis and the French Citizens' Convention for the Climate which do tend to focus on long-term changes. However, the legislative impact of both processes has been difficult to assess. In the case of the Global Assembly, the evaluation report held that "Qualitatively, a number of Assembly Members expressed disappointment in the lack of uptake of the People's Declaration by delegations in COP26, as well as the general quality of decisions reached at COP26" (Global Assembly, 2022). This cannot be seen separately from the limitations inherent to the COP process, which in itself does not produce any legally binding obligations and requires full consensus among member states. In the case of the French Convention, the government had more control over the implementation and has made efforts to quantify institutional uptake. By its own admission, 146 of 149 proposals made by the members of the Assembly have been or are being fully or partially put in place (French government, 2023). Independent research by KNOCA (Averchenkova, Koehl & Smith, 2024) nuances this number, with about 75 recommendations only partially implemented.

4.1. Influencing global decision-making

Even though the UN enjoys higher levels of trust from citizens around the world than other multilateral institutions (Glocalities, 2020) and in many cases than national ones, such as parliaments, political parties or governments (Haerpfer et al., 2022), this is not due to any connection of citizens to UN decision-making but related to support of the UN's overall goals. Of course, the UN already offers various avenues for stakeholder consultation, like via the Major Groups originally established at the Rio Conference 1992, but these need to be distinguished from direct citizen participation. Input collected by the UN itself, summarized in the UN75 Report (UN, 2021), showed that people around the world do perceive the UN to be far away from their daily lives and agrees that direct participation mechanisms could be a potential path to alleviate this. Currently no such mechanisms are in place and GCAs offer a compelling possibility for global citizens to influence international decisions and the future of multi-lateralism (cf. Folly et al, 2024). In addition, GCAs can help educate its participants and the public at large and help strengthen a global "common-feeling" and the idea of global citizenship necessary for humanity to tackle global challenges together. GCAs could also contribute to a potential global constitution-making process, in particular a UN Charter review conference.

4.2. Limitations specific to GCAs

GCAs face specific challenges and limitations. Achieving a representative deliberative assembly on a global scale with regard to demographic characteristics such as age, gender, social and economic background, level of education, disability or location is challenging given the world population's vast size and diversity.

As proper deliberation depends on personal interaction, global language barriers are often seen as a significant issue. Any GCA may need to accommodate dozens of languages, requiring extensive translation and interpretation services. Translation requirements in themselves can hinder effective communication and affect the quality of deliberations (cf. Cordier, 2025). That this is not insurmountable was demonstrated by the Conference on the Future of Europe, which accommodated translation services in 24 languages and the Global Assembly on the Climate and Ecological Crisis, which accommodated 39. In the long run, the issue of translation will become less important with advancing reliability and quality of computed simultaneous interpretation (Cabrera, 2022). Furthermore, it has been argued that multilingualism is an asset for deliberative democracy rather than an obstacle as it enables a more comprehensive examination of issues by drawing on the unique vocabularies and nuances of different languages (Verhasselt, 2024).

Cultural differences may also complicate discussions as participants' diverse worldviews and customs can lead to misunderstandings. Logistical and financial demands are also at a different scale compared to assemblies at the national and even more so at the subnational level. Convening participants from across the world in-person involves not only significant costs for travel and accommodation but also issues related to deeply inequitable visa regimes. International travel also requires more time investment on the part of members. In terms of online meetings, adequate access to the internet as well as technical skills and availability of adequate equipment cannot be taken for granted. As of 2025, for instance, only 67.9% of the global population uses the internet (Statista, 2025).

Niemeyer and Dryzek (2024) highlight challenges in global citizen deliberation, citing the absence of central authority, a global population register,

strong global publics, familiarity with governance structures, and demographic and ideological diversity. They propose considering a tailored mix of recruitment methods, including randomness, diversity, discursiveness, prior participation, and affectedness (id.: 612).

While demographic representativeness may not always be the goal, deviations do raise questions about legitimacy and selection criteria. Who determines which voices matter? Decision-makers in this process hold significant influence over inclusion and it can be argued that testimonies can help ensure perspectives from affected communities or minorities are represented as well.

The problem of a global governance vacuum exacerbates the issue of citizens' assemblies' expected or desired policy impact. GCAs would usually address their recommendations to UN bodies such as the UNGA but the UNGA's own resolutions are not legally binding under international law. So even if the UNGA were to pick up and endorse a GCA's input, it will usually still need an intergovernmental treaty to take legal effect. On the other hand, a GCA's impact should not be measured alone by the extent to which official bodies pick up their policy recommendations. There are also less quantifiable, but no less important effects of education of the global public, collective problem-solving, improved social cohesion and positive experiences with policy making that lead to an activated citizenship (Ehsassi, 2024).

4.3. A proof of concept

The 2021 Global Assembly on the Climate and Ecological Crisis has been the most comprehensive experiment to implement a GCA to date. It was organized by a network of civil society organizations who set out to demonstrate that global citizen deliberation is desirable, feasible, useful, and impactful. They recruited 100 participants from around the world, in locations that were chosen based on population density. The participants deliberated for 12 weeks and drafted a People's Declaration for the Sustainable Future of Planet Earth which was presented at the COP26 climate conference in Glasgow. With the help of local facilitators, the assembly ensured that internet access and language barriers did not constitute a hurdle for the Assembly members. A follow-up, the Global

Citizens' Assembly for People and Planet, organized by a multi-stakeholder coalition led by ISWE Foundation and with the backing of the Brazilian government, is planned for COP30 in Belém in 2025.

4.4. As an element of a multi-layered ecosystem

Global governance is highly fragmented across multiple institutions, governments, stakeholders and layers. We envisage that the format of GCAs will be set up and used by different actors, including, but not limited to, the UN as a main platform of multilateral cooperation and action. GCAs will become part of an interconnected, networked – and not necessarily institutionalized – "deliberative system" (Wilson & Mellier, 2023). GCAs operating in different contexts can take different approaches and focus on different types of impact strategies (cf. id.).

Deliberative ecosystems are already emerging. The GCA linked to the 2025 climate negotiations COP30, for instance, is anticipated to entail a local component through multiple self-organized local community assemblies. The projects World Wide Views (carried out in 2012 and 2015) and We the Internet (since 2020) involved simultaneous citizen's dialogues in multiple locations (28 in 2012 and 75 in 2015) and created connections between citizen deliberation and decision-makers at various levels of governance, including the UNFCCC for the dialogue on Climate and Energy in 2015. We The Internet featured dialogues in 76 locations and was supported by the UN General Secretariat and UNESCO. These citizens' dialogues focused on relevance and diversity by overrepresenting groups who are specifically affected, rather than on traditional representative sampling. Their multilayered approach offered clear benefits in linking the local to the global, making the overall process more relevant and impactful. Distributing and linking deliberation in this way increases the chances that outputs gain political and societal traction beyond addressing particular institutions.

5. Pathways for implementation

In principle, there are many pathways for institutionalizing GCAs in global governance. One pathway entails their creation and operation by UN bodies, while others envision them being outside the UN system. These approaches are not mutually exclusive. There can be different GCAs in different configurations in parallel or at different points in time set up and operated by different actors, embedded into an entire decentralized ecosystem as discussed above.

In this chapter, we focus primarily on the concept of a permanent framework for GCAs under which there could either be a single GCA as a permanent structure (Model A) or multiple GCAs as had hoc occurrences, but supported by a permanent framework (Model B), as these cases offer clear benefits in terms of cost efficiency and logistical synergy. Moreover, having a permanent framework with an institutional memory in place over the long run may be more effective than purely ad hoc one-off assemblies. It could also help to build the legitimacy of GCAs and promote accountability. Ad hoc one-off assemblies may still be initiated by relevant actors and might offer their own unique benefits.

5.1. Within the UN system

The UN could use citizens' assemblies to get input on a variety of topics under consideration by different bodies and institutions. To establish a GCA within the UN core organization, Article 22 of the UN Charter could serve as a legal mechanism as it permits the UNGA to create subsidiary organs as it deems necessary to fulfill its work. The number of bodies ever established under this Article probably exceeds 500 with an average of around sixty in existence at any given period of time (Khan, 2012: 721). Due to their extraordinary variety, attempts to produce a satisfying doctrinal typology are doomed to fail (cf. id.). In particular, the UNGA can grant an autonomous or semi-autonomous status, making Article 22 a flexible tool to achieve a wide spectrum of desired institutional arrangements.

The process would begin with a member state or ideally a coalition of like-minded states proposing a resolution under Article 22 that establishes a

GCA framework to implement one of the above models A or B. The resolution would need to define the modalities, structure, funding, and operational protocols, among other things.

Once drafted and proposed, the resolution would undergo debate and then require a majority vote from the UNGA to be adopted. Following its approval, a dedicated body identified in the resolution would prepare more detailed operational guidelines to be approved either by the UNGA or by the body itself. These guidelines would cover essential technical components, such as member selection processes, the frequency of meetings, or reporting mechanisms. They would also define the exact process for selecting topics. This includes specifying which UN bodies and entities have the authority, under certain conditions, to put topics on the agenda (Model A) or initiate an assembly (Model B). These standards and rules should be subject to periodic review and mechanisms for learning and reflexivity.

A GCA could also be established by one of the UN's specialized agencies, such as the UNFCCC. While citizens' assemblies should be part of the routine toolbox of various UN programs and agencies, there is a risk of fragmentation, inefficiency and conflicting standards if each entity organizes their own assembly process separately. A general-purpose framework under Article 22 is preferable that allows particular entities to initiate GCAs on specific topics under standard protocols (Model B). This would accommodate the complexity of global governance and the variety of matters under consideration. GCAs could be triggered if and when needed and run in parallel on different topics.

If the goal is to set up a framework for the UN, doing so by means of Article 22 is easier and more efficient than setting it up by a new intergovernmental treaty. A treaty requires individual opt-in by member states through ratifications and connecting a treaty-based framework with the UN ultimately would require a UNGA resolution as well. The treaty route primarily comes into play in a scenario when sufficient support at the UN—at least a majority—does not appear to materialize. In this case, the GCA, at least initially, would fall outside the UN system.

Under an established UN framework, a given GCA, whether permanent (Model A) or ad hoc (Model B), would serve an advisory role by deliberating on particular global issues and submitting recommendations to the UNGA, UNSC and/or other UN bodies. These recommendations could either be new policy formulations, implementation guidelines or specific actions. The GCA(s) would formally present their findings at relevant meetings, with GCA representatives offering insights and responding to questions from member states and officials. The terms for this advisory function would be established in the original resolution or subsequent instruments. An important element is to establish an obligation to respond in a timely manner on the part of the commissioning authority and to explain why a GCA's recommendations were accepted, rejected, deferred or adjusted.

A dedicated secretariat would be responsible for the effective functioning of the GCA framework. It would handle relevant operations, in particular meeting logistics, documentation, coordination, internal and external communication as well as support budget planning and members' selection. By centralizing these responsibilities, a sound foundation is provided to ensure that GCAs operate smoothly under either model.

5.2. Outside the UN system

GCAs can be organized and convened by a variety of possible actors alternatively or in addition to the UN, such as civil society groups, philanthropic organizations, academic institutions, intergovernmental forums such as the G20 and many others, including collaborative (multistakeholder) coalitions set up for the purpose.

As Machani (2024) found, non-state actors (such as those mentioned before) hold a "significant degree of hidden and invisible power," which they could use to champion GCAs in global governance. Furthermore, a coalition of state and non-state actors could commission a GCA and commit to taking action without reference to the UN or other intergovernmental organizations. An intergovernmental treaty of like-minded states is an option to ensure legally binding and long-term commitment. Another scenario is a philanthropic organization commissioning a GCA on how best

to allocate its resources. Or, as mentioned below, a private sector organization could run a GCA on internal corporate matters.

GCAs often would still aim to influence global policy-making and direct their recommendations to formal institutions of global governance, including, but not limited to those of the UN system. Often, these will be one-off assemblies. For civil society and/or the private sector it appears to be harder to maintain a permanent GCA framework in the long run than it would be for the UN, given the substantial effort and funding it requires. In any event, none of the pathways and scenarios discussed here are mutually exclusive.

In terms of assemblies potentially organized by the private sector, Giessen (2023) questions whether it is actually appropriate for private companies to run or fund deliberative processes touching on relevant industry regulation, citing potential conflicts of interest. Giessen suggests such processes are best suited for internal corporate matters but not for helping shape public policy. Caution is advised in particular if GCAs are set up in the context of so-called multistakeholder global governance arrangements with strong private sector involvement as there is a risk of "legitimacy phishing" or "democracy washing" with regard to the development and implementation of self-regulatory standards and rules (on multistakeholderism and democracy see Gleckman, 2018).

Clear and practical mechanisms for transmitting recommendations to decision-making bodies are essential. A GCA's recommendations should be drafted in a way so it is clear who they are addressed to irrespective of the formal method of transmission. The GCA Secretariat or the convening organization(s), as applicable, need to officially communicate the GCA's recommendations to the appropriate addressees. In order to increase their public and political relevance, GCA sessions could be scheduled to align with major global events such as UNGA, COP or G20 meetings, depending on the subject matter under deliberation. If a GCA addresses recommendations to UN bodies without them having commissioned it in the first place, it will be difficult to claim an obligation to respond, at least in formal terms. In this case, a GCA's moral and political authority and the leverage of its underlying movement will play a more critical role.

In terms of formal channels, a GCA in question, or its convening organization(s), at a minimum could seek to establish or use an existing consultative status with the UN's ECOSOC or the Department of Global Communications to feed input developed by the assembly into relevant meetings, conferences and processes. The specific nature of GCAs, however, would justify going beyond such a routine NGO status and to seek a special relationship, for instance through a dedicated UNGA resolution or a Memorandum of Understanding concluded with the UN Secretary-General or other bodies. This resolution or memorandum could outline official arrangements for GCA submissions to be made and circulated, including virtual and in-person presentations and briefings, as well as formalize an obligation to respond. In addition, liaison officers could be identified, and officers designated for this purpose, to maintain continuous communication between GCAs and relevant UN bodies. On the part of the GCA, the officers who manage communication and UN relations would be support staff of the GCA Secretariat or the convening organization(s) and not the GCA members themselves, who are involved only temporarily to deliberate.

5.3. Topic selection

Topic selection is a crucial design element for citizens' assemblies, and determining how this would work for a GCA demands thorough exploration, whether it is done within the UN system or outside. Typically, topic selection can be seen as two key phases. The first is selecting the overarching topic for deliberation (e.g., climate change, artificial intelligence, or global health). This decision reflects policy priorities and is usually made by the assembly's initiators. The second task is crafting the specific question for participants to address (e.g., "Should AI chatbots resemble humans?"). This step often involves consultation with technical experts and specialists in participatory processes to ensure clarity and focus. In the context of the UN system, the topic chosen for the assembly would determine which agencies are involved or vice versa.

Three main approaches to topic selection at the global level can be envisaged based on lessons from national and global assemblies:

The commissioning authority both sets the topic and controls the agenda. For example, OpenAI provided a list of topics for deliberation but omitted controversial issues like data transparency (Giessen, 2023). Similarly, Meta's agenda for its Community Forums was crafted by its generative AI team and Stanford collaborators (Wetherall-Grujić, 2024). This method may be seen as less democratic, though it can be justified when there is a clear purpose for the assembly and a commitment to using public input. For a GCA which is built into the UN system, the agenda could be set by the UNSC, the UNGA or a specific body set up for the purpose.

Topic selection and agenda-setting can also involve multiple stakeholders. In Ireland, the topic and mandate for the 2016 Citizens' Assembly was specified by the Oireachtas (parliament) and the chair appointed by the government. A civil society secretariat, and an expert advisory group jointly formulated the more detailed agenda. The Global Assembly on the Climate and Ecological Crisis took a similar approach, with a Knowledge and Wisdom Committee of experts setting the remit after the organizing civil society organizations had agreed on "How can humanity address the climate and ecological crisis in a fair and effective way?" as the main topic. For a GCA linked to the UN, after a mandate or topic selection set out by the UNGA or UNSC, a GCA secretariat in collaboration with major groups, civil society and subnational authorities could develop a more detailed agenda and scope for the assembly to discuss.

Agenda-setting can also include citizens in various forms. In Denmark's Climate Assembly, a government-established board set the remit, but Assembly Members chose the themes to prioritize. In Belgium, the 2011 G1000 initiated a citizens' summit where the three main topics were shaped and selected through an online consultation. Belgium's Ostbelgien permanent citizens' dialogue allows a sortition-based assembly to select the topic and set the agenda for future assemblies. In Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the process was also opened up to the city's residents. Globally, some propose a model where a 200-person "agenda council" is formed from randomly selected participants of regional assemblies (Vlerick, 2020) or from previous GCAs. This council would be in charge of identifying the topic, identifying the institution the assembly will address and developing the agenda.

5.4. Selecting members

The goal of a GCA is to demographically reflect the diversity of global voices, or, in other words, to provide a snapshot of humanity. As Pope (2023: 174) noted, however, if the goal was to "create a plausible micro-cosm" of the global human population, an assembly even of 500 members "would hardly be enough" because the minorities "unlikely to be represented would be quite massive" given the world population's size. Rather, a proper "sample assembly" would have to number "more than five thousand" in his opinion (id.). A workable deliberative assembly of this size is not possible, for a variety of reasons (not least budgetary). It should be clear that any practical GCA will be an approximation to an ideal and will need to work around the issue of a non-existing global register. This is no reason though to depart from the objective of achieving best possible representativeness.

In the case of the Global Assembly on the Climate and Ecological Crisis, two stages were involved (Global Assembly Team, 2022: 48-73). First, a location lottery was conducted based on an algorithm which determined 100 locations in the world, taking population weights in consideration. Secondly, in each of the selected locations, a community host was then recruited who in turn selected 4-6 people within 200 kilometers. This created a pool of potential participants from which one was picked from each location by lottery, attempting to reflect the world's demographics in terms of geography, gender, age, education and views on climate change. An evaluation considered this process "less than ideal", as there usually was a social connection between the community hosts and potential participants they shortlisted, but it also noted that civic lottery as conceptualized scientifically in practical terms is "simply impossible to implement" in some contexts (Curato et al., 2023: 52). One of the other points put forward was a lack of participation of those "most affected" by climate change.

5.5. Engaging members and the public

Citizens' assemblies by nature are vast processes that gather diverse perspectives and realities and this is even more the case for GCAs. In order to guarantee an inclusive space that fosters constructive dialogue and engenders maximum impact, it is important that the individual members of a GCA are trained, supported and empowered. Ehsassi sets out ten guiding

principles for co-responsibility and voice. These range from providing sufficient time for learning, deliberation and drafting, to including participants in co-creating the GCA itself, to supporting them with media training (Ehsassi, 2024).

Whether a citizens' assembly is embedded within the UN system or set up outside of it, it will be important to engage the public at large. To promote transparency, access and wider participation, a digital platform should make GCA recommendations publicly available to UN institutions, member states, and the general public. An online portal could function as a space for deliberation, where users could post proposals on specific topics and vote on others' suggestions. Drawing from precedents like France's Citizens' Convention for the Climate and the Conference on the Future of Europe, the portal could include a mechanism for integrating digital contributions into assembly discussions. The UN could leverage its experience with digital consultation tools, such as the online platform used for the "Our Common Agenda" report, to build a robust and inclusive online engagement system (Igarapé Institute, 2021). Whether the deliberations themselves should be public or not is a sensitive issue. It could be argued that publicity would increase trust among the general public, but it raises serious questions of spontaneity and safety for the participants.

Media campaigns and public consultations could help raise awareness of the assembly's activities, invite feedback, and foster broader public dialogue. This is instrumental in shaping political support and public acceptance of GCA recommendations. Due to the exclusive nature of actual participation in GCAs, which is reserved to (several) hundred of selected participants, efforts should be made to bring the debate down to the level of affected communities. A model for this can be found in the Global Assembly on the Climate and Ecological Crisis, which adopted a system of over 300 decentralized community assemblies and a so-called "cultural wave" coordinated by volunteers to accompany the "official" Assembly discussions. These community assemblies were based on self-selection, not least to ameliorate issues such as the non-inclusion of certain minority groups.

In the case of an independent GCA, not connected to the UN, it will require greater public engagement and lobbying for its recommendations to receive

visibility and acceptance in the UN system. Nonetheless, even recommendations adopted by a GCA set up within the UN system would rely on lobbying with member states in order to be supported. This affirms the need for a strong coalition of stakeholders in either case.

5.6. Challenges and considerations

The successful introduction of GCAs within the UN system hinges on securing the political will of member states. While at least a majority is needed to pass a UNGA resolution as recommended before, building the necessary momentum requires proactive leadership from a group of like-minded countries working with the UN Secretariat.

Citizens' assemblies are used by governments as an opportunity to explore innovative methods of addressing stalemates on divisive issues and the same could apply vis-à-vis global matters. GCAs' ability to foster dialogue, depolarize debates, and propose balanced, inclusive solutions can make them an appealing tool for the UN and member states seeking to break through political deadlocks, in particular on urgent challenges.

GCAs can help enhance the legitimacy of global decision-making by incorporating the perspectives of individual citizens from diverse cultural and national backgrounds. This feature could resonate with governments aiming to rebuild public trust in multilateral institutions and global public policy. Promoting and engaging with GCAs can thus serve as a means for UN member states to demonstrate their commitment to participatory governance, improving their standing and credibility on the international stage.

Civil society organizations and networks, individually and collectively, advocated for the UN to consider setting up GCAs in the UN's various consultations in the run up to the UN's Summit of the Future in September 2024 which adopted the Pact for the Future (cf. Open Letter, 2024). According to the modalities determined by the UNGA, the Pact was to be negotiated and passed by consensus, making it hard, if not impossible, for innovative proposals to be included (Bummel, 2024). In the current political environment, like-minded member states would either need to pursue a

process at the UN that is based on majorities instead of consensus or—alternatively or in parallel—seek suitable arrangements outside the UN.

To ensure GCAs are impactful, it is essential to establish mechanisms that guarantee meaningful follow-up on their recommendations. Commitments by the UN, such as scheduling formal debates in the UNGA or the UNSC—and any concerned agency—can help institutionalize the integration of GCA outputs into global policymaking.

These steps would not only validate the role of GCAs but also strengthen their influence as a mechanism for helping resolve global challenges collaboratively.

With an independent GCA, outside of the UN system, it is even more crucial to gain institutional buy-in, UN member states' support, and a clear path for influence on policy outcomes. However, their position outside the UN system would presumably allow for more public and targeted campaigning.

Managing expectations is important: there should be a realistic assessment of the potential policy impact of a given GCA and it should be clearly outlined at the start, to avoid frustration on the part of both assembly members and the public.

6. Funding

The issue of funding concerns two principal questions: what level of funding is required and how will it be provided? The answers to both to a large degree depend on how exactly the operations and structure of a given GCA are envisioned. There are many different viable scenarios, elements of which we have touched on in the previous chapters.

6.1. Funding requirements

The scope of operations significantly impacts resource needs. The total membership in a GCA might range from 100 to over 500 members, with larger assemblies obviously requiring more support staff, logistical effort and funding. The level of compensation as well as the frequency of sessions, particularly in-person meetings, further affects costs. In so far as a permanent framework is concerned, we discussed two generalized approaches before, Model A and B. Model A would involve a permanent GCA that deliberates continuously on different topics. The latter, Model B, would allow for an easy setting up of ad hoc assemblies as needed. Which of the models would be more cost-effective is difficult to predict. While a GCA in permanent operation may appear to require more funding, setting up many different ad hoc GCAs under a permanent framework may require just as much, if not more, depending on their number. However, the number of ad hoc assemblies that can be triggered in a given period of time may actually be determined by the funding available. Furthermore, under Model B, the framework might allow for different types and scales of GCAs to be set up, including smaller ones that are more cost-efficient. Given this flexibility, Model B overall seems to be preferable from a funding perspective. In either case, support would be required by regional offices across different world regions. GCA sessions under both models could rotate between different countries and regions to increase global engagement. A global Secretariat could be located in a city hosting UN institutions to leverage synergies and minimize costs. Different possible types and scales of public engagement and online platforms will further impact resource needs.

The variability of all possible parameters involved makes it necessary to relate funding estimates to clearly defined scenarios. Exploring detailed models and their corresponding resource implications is beyond the scope

of this paper and should be looked into by future studies. While we cannot provide any particular estimate, it is worth noting that the civil society-organized Global Assembly on the occasion of the Glasgow climate negotiations COP26 in 2021 incurred an overall expenditure of around one million US dollars, with the assembly having 100 members deliberating exclusively in online meetings (Global Assembly Team, 2022: 243). It may be possible to extrapolate this sum taking into consideration additional cost of in-person meetings, a larger assembly and permanent staff, and thus arrive at a rough figure. By comparison, the UN system's total revenue in 2022 was US$ 74.3 billion of which US$ 7.169 billion were attributed to the UN Secretariat (Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, 2024: 14). The cost involved for running GCAs does not appear to be prohibitive relative to the potential benefit of strengthened longer-term and legitimized policy, and further examination is warranted.

6.2. Funding sources

A GCA framework that is set up within the UN system could most obviously be funded by assessed or voluntary contributions of UN member states or a mix thereof. Basing funding primarily on assessed contributions is the best option as it will make funding stable and more independent from political considerations, at least in principle. Responsibility would be distributed across all governments using an established model. On the other hand, a system based on voluntary contributions may be easier to set up, as member states will want to avoid increasing regular budgetary obligations, but it will make funding less predictable and more politicized. Certain governments may tend to only fund or keep funding a GCA framework if they are politically satisfied with the selected topics or outcomes and otherwise withdraw, something that is not easily possible in the case of assessed contributions. Member states entering voluntarily into binding commitments for a period of time would be the ideal arrangement in the alternative case of voluntary contributions. Nonetheless, it needs to be acknowledged that the UN has been subject to regular funding and liquidity crises since its inception and many member states provide their contributions in a delayed manner. Funding of a GCA framework within the UN would be vulnerable to the same issues.

Voluntary contributions of governments are possible in either case, whether or not a GCA is implemented within or outside the UN. Diverse funding sources in both cases are not mutually exclusive and contributions could be pooled in a trust fund. Democratic Action Funds, a model where governments dedicate five percent of the cost of running their national and local elections to support civic dialogue and deliberation each year, are another possible way to secure state funding (DAF, 2023). Possible sources apart from publicly funded institutions such as governments, intergovernmental organizations or multilateral agencies include ordinary citizens, high net worth individuals, philanthropic foundations and networks as well as private sector institutions and companies. Civil society organizations are potential funding sources, too, but it needs to be recognized that any funding they contribute will usually originate from other sources in one way or another, civil society being de facto an intermediary. An idea that may be worth further examination is setting up a global lottery the proceeds of which is dedicated to funding GCAs and other relevant structures and activities that support global citizen participation, deliberation and representation, in particular those championed by the "We The Peoples" campaign. Finally, in addition to direct funding, public and private institutions could also contribute in-house resources for free or at little cost, for instance by providing meeting venues, staff time or logistical and technical support.

7. Ensuring integrity and independence

The purpose of GCAs is to be a platform for open deliberation that enables their members to come to their own conclusions and recommendations. According to Parry and Curato (2024), integrity risks occur before, during and after a deliberative process and in the surrounding commissioning and implementation context. Risk areas to be considered are economic pressures, control and constraint by commissioning authorities, orthodoxy of design, poor governance and ambiguous impact and integration into the political system (id.: 1).

In general terms, GCAs and their members need to be shielded from potential undue influence seeking to manipulate or steer discussions and outcomes in a certain way directly or indirectly. This concerns governments and institutions of the private sector but also any other actor, in particular a GCA's own organizers, convenors, hosts and funders.

A framework of ethical standards, inclusivity, transparency and oversight is needed to help protect the integrity and independence of GCAs. As part of this, robust conflict of interest policies must be implemented and regularly updated. These should include strict rules to prevent undue influence and ensure the policies remain relevant and effective as circumstances evolve. An Ethics Committee composed of independent individuals should monitor conflicts of interest, investigate breaches, and hold stakeholders and members accountable. In this regard, consideration should also be given to the UN's participatory practices thus far and what institutionalized response to conflicts of interest they provided for, if any. As far as individual GCA members are concerned, they would need to be obliged to report attempts at influencing them in prohibited ways and violations could lead to their expulsion. An example for an ethics body exists in France, where the citizens' assemblies on climate and on assisted dying were accompanied by "Guarantors" whose role it is to oversee the process and ensure diverse perspectives are represented.

It is essential that a GCA's operations, procedures and decision-making mechanisms are transparent. Funding sources and their contributions as well as partnerships need to be disclosed publicly. Clear guidelines in particular for private sector involvement must be established. The proposed

Global Citizens' Assembly on Genome Editing, for instance, has rejected funding from companies with vested interests to safeguard its independence.

The **expert selection process** is a delicate element that requires transparency as expert input may significantly contribute to opinion formation. It needs to be science-based while allowing for incorporation of diverse forms of knowledge, enable different perspectives and must not be driven by the intention to favor a certain view. Among other things, it needs to be clear what criteria are being used to select experts and who makes the decision. It is good practice to establish a knowledge committee or curation of evidence committee, composed of independent experts, who shape the structure of discussion, curate the learning materials and select the expert speakers.

Ensuring **global inclusivity** is critical. GCAs must facilitate global participation and provide for mechanisms that enable free participation of individuals, including those under authoritarian rule. Even if no direct influence is taken by the governments in question, members may consciously or subconsciously self-censor their contribution for fear of negative consequences for them and their families. In such cases, individuals could perhaps be selected from among the diaspora instead of the country's resident population, which could reduce though not eliminate this risk. Another way to help mitigate the risk could be through guaranteeing anonymity of concerned assembly members as far as possible, having non-public sessions and secret voting.

In line with Parry and Curato (2024), **impact and integration** need to be conceptualized as integrity risks as well as they concern the overall environment in which a GCA operates. If the claimed or anticipated impact is not achieved, public trust and credibility are damaged. This highlights the importance of formal arrangements and an obligation on the part of commissioning authorities to seriously consider and respond to GCA input as noted before.

8. Relationship to other proposed bodies and instruments

The establishment of a permanent GCA—a body that would allow "ordinary citizens, selected by civic lottery to be representative of the world's population, a say on pressing global challenges"—is one of four priority proposals aimed at enhancing inclusive and accountable global governance highlighted in a joint open letter signed by nearly 170 civil society organizations ahead of the 2024 UN Summit of the Future. The other measures put forward in the letter are those championed by the "We The Peoples" campaign for inclusive global governance: the creation of a UN Parliamentary Assembly, a UN World Citizens' Initiative and UN Civil Society Envoy (Open Letter, 2024).

Each of these four proposed bodies and instruments have a value and rationale of their own. They can be implemented separately, in processes that are independent of each other. Each of them faces specific challenges. Nonetheless, they are conceptually interlinked, mutually reinforcing and fully complementary as they cover different dimensions and functions serving the goal of broadening participation and representation in global affairs.

8.1. A UN Parliamentary Assembly

A UN Parliamentary Assembly (UNPA) is proposed as a body that "would include sitting members of national parliaments or directly elected representatives in the work of the UN and act as a watchdog that reflects a broad diversity of global viewpoints" (id.). Serving mainly an advisory and oversight role at first, the "powers and functions of the assembly should be expanded gradually with the long-term objective of developing a world parliament" (Brauer & Bummel, 2020: 1). There are numerous international parliamentary institutions that provide lessons for conceptualizing a UNPA (cf. Schimmelfennig et al., 2020). The European Parliament is the most advanced. A GCA and UNPA both have a deliberative function. In the case of a UNPA an important additional objective is to enhance formal political representation. While a GCA engages random private citizens in an individual capacity in the short run, a UNPA brings together elected representatives for longer terms who in the vast majority will generally be

linked to political parties and, in principle, are accountable to their constituencies. Members of a UNPA are anticipated to form transnational political groups (Brauer & Bummel: 64-8). A GCA by contrast has no such role or purpose. Its claim to representativeness is limited to mirroring the wider population, but not the act of representation or speaking on behalf of others, though it is possible that some assembly members will carry the issues of their local communities, kinship networks, and other affiliations in the GCA. Nonetheless, citizens' assemblies in general, and a GCA in particular, in our opinion should not be empowered with political oversight or governance functions, which are instead proposed for a UNPA. Even less should they have an exclusive legislative role (Leinen & Bummel, 2024: 431-2). This underlines the complementary institutional relationship between a CGA (which is part of the UN) and a UNPA. Including citizens' views via GCAs and giving elected representatives a formal role are two different approaches that would work well in tandem, and arguably both are needed. Fiket (2023: 207) concluded that without "democratic transformation of the institutional design of a global system that would allow the transparency and accountability of global decision-making procedures and processes, the CAs can be, at best, used to improve the democratic legitimacy of specific political decisions". A UNPA is actually proposed as a key vehicle for a democratic institutional reform of the global system and could help make GCAs more impactful, not least by considering and potentially endorsing their recommendations. Once it exists, a UNPA could also set up or trigger GCAs itself in addition to providing a mechanism for individuals to put forward petitions as national parliaments usually do. And the influence flows both ways. Establishing GCAs now can help educate the global public on the need for more effective, just, and accountable global governance. GCAs themselves might be tasked with examining the state and effectiveness of the global governance architecture and end up proposing the creation of a UNPA.

8.2. A UN World Citizens' Initiative

A UN World Citizens' Initiative (UNWCI) is described in the Open Letter (2024) as an instrument that "would enable people to put proposals on the agenda of the UNGA if they get a certain number of signatures globally". The instrument of citizens' initiative is well established at the local and

regional levels in many countries. The online "Navigator to Direct Democracy" includes over 200 entries of this type across the world.[2] The primary inspiration for the UNWCI is the European Citizens Initiative (ECI) which is included in the EU Treaty and represents the only transnational instrument of this kind to date. In principle, any citizen in a given constituency can help set up or later endorse an initiative. In the case of a UNWCI tied to the UN, "anybody should be able to support it" irrespective of residency or citizenship (Organ & Murphy, 2019: 55). The UNWCI instrument has a participatory and agenda-setting nature (id.: 33). It does not itself serve the purpose of deliberation. Rather, the instrument triggers deliberation on a given initiative by the body it is addressed to and seeks to influence its subsequent decision-making. Apart from existing UN bodies, the UNWCI could also be linked to a GCA and UNPA, enabling global citizens to help drive their agenda. Policies endorsed by a GCA and/or a UNPA originating from a grassroots UNWCI would arguably enjoy unprecedented legitimacy.

8.3. A UN Civil Society Envoy

A UN Civil Society Envoy is supposed to "enable greater participation, spur inclusive convenings and amplify the UN's outreach to civil society, other major stakeholders, and the public" (Open Letter, 2024). The proposed envoy would serve an executive and operational function. The office of this "civil society champion" would be set up as part of the UN Secretariat and the role is envisaged to be a senior one reporting directly to the UN Secretary-General or the Deputy Secretary-General (Together First, 2020: 17). The task is to include monitoring and assessing "civil society engagement across the UN System" and "looking for where there are inconsistencies or roadblocks" (id.). It should be assumed that a GCA framework will provide mechanisms for civil society engagement such as expert testimony provided by NGOs or NGO participation in oversight mechanisms. The envoy nonetheless could have an eye on their being effective and act as a bridge if and where appropriate.

2 https://direct-democracy-navigator.org/

9. Conclusion

Deliberation and decision-making in the institutions of global governance are usually far away from the world's people. There are few, if any, formal mechanisms that engage ordinary people and give them an opportunity to be heard. As key issues affecting them are discussed globally, this may contribute to undermining people's trust in multilateralism and democracy which in turn makes both less effective. Growing experience with citizens' assemblies indicates that this deliberative format may be a way to help narrow the citizens-elite gap at the global scale if recommendations are in fact considered and addressed.[3] The concept of GCAs comes with distinct challenges and limitations given the world's vast scale and diversity. In fact, any form of global public engagement entails certain risks. We have come to the conclusion, however, that GCAs can be implemented as useful platforms for global citizens' deliberation and input. If their input is taken seriously, we anticipate that GCAs can contribute to enhancing the quality and responsiveness of global policy-making in the spirit of advancing collaborative approaches to serving the global common good. GCAs thus can serve a clearly beneficial function. At the same time, it needs to be recognized that the international system is fraught with its own distinctive dysfunctions and challenges, and that drawing on citizen input is, in itself, unable to address and puts limits on these. In particular, there is an absence of any formal and legitimate decision-making power at the global scale. Solving this issue would require far-reaching changes which, at this point, are independent of implementing GCAs, and are not the subject of this paper. GCAs, nonetheless, are fully complementary to other bodies and instruments proposed in the field of enhancing the participatory and democratic character of global governance, and the UN specifically, such as a UN Parliamentary Assembly and a UN World Citizens' Initiative.

While there are important universal principles relevant to any GCA, the exact implementation can be done in a variety of ways, by different actors, and on different topics. With regard to policy- and decision-making at the UN, we recommend that the UN sets up a permanent framework for

3 On the citizens-elite gap cf. Dellmuth et al. 2022

GCAs. This would allow the core organization and the entities of the UN system to benefit from citizens' deliberation under standardized and institutionalized procedures. In this paper we considered two models for this: (A) a GCA which is in permanent operation or (B) a framework that allows for setting up and operating different ad hoc GCAs as needed. We tend to conclude that the latter approach, Model B, would be able to deliver more flexibly and hence better, given the number and complexity of issues under consideration at various UN bodies and agencies at any given point in time. Detailed studies will be required to investigate specific scenarios of implementation. We envision that a UN framework would ideally be part of the UN core organization and funded by assessed contributions of UN Member States, supplemented by additional funding for particular ad hoc GCAs through voluntary contributions. We are confident that this would be money well invested. In any event, the crucial first step is for UN member states to muster the political will, and we hope that this study has contributed to this by illuminating the key issues.

We envision a UN GCA framework to be part of a growing ecosystem of citizens' assemblies spanning across all levels. Neither of the UN-related models discussed here precludes actors outside of the UN from organizing GCAs on their own terms. Each GCA in its own way and context can serve the purpose of enhancing citizens' deliberation and input on matters of global importance.

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