

# Way deeper democracy

*Working draft (November 2016)*

## Introduction

Fairer, more inclusive ways of public decision-making are springing up across different continents, offering people far more say in the political decisions that shape their lives. The effect is to free people's energies, imagination and creativity for themselves, their fellow citizens and communities.

Among the most promising are lottery-based systems – using randomly selected groups of people to reflect on political questions and recommend solutions, much like criminal juries. Another is participatory budgeting, an idea born of efforts to ease extreme poverty in Brazil, which gives citizens direct influence over how sizeable amounts of public money are spent where they live.

Findings from such systems showcase people's inherent political wisdom and natural sense of social justice. They demonstrate the real possibility of radically better decisions to those delivered by existing political systems. The idea of their spread elsewhere raises enticing prospects of a politics that is way more inclusive, responsive, transparent and accountable for the people affected.

To seed these efforts elsewhere needs more people to know they exist and that they work. They will need little persuading given the dysfunction of existing representative democracies. The US presidential race is a case in point – never before have the two main candidates been less liked. Within these multiple crises lie great opportunities, ones that are both positive and hopeful. The untapped fuel for their rise is a collective hunger for better, fairer governments.

A key challenge remains popular notions of representative democracy itself – or rather the idea that regular votes to choose our rulers are either ever free or fair. Experience shows they're not, yielding the same, failing policies regardless of who wins. What then could take their place?

Political innovations and experiments – such as citizen juries chosen by lottery – make credible claims to be radically better for those being governed (the “*demos*” of “democracy”, that is). For these to spread and thrive, we need to understand them better and to make them better known. We need to do more experiments, to mix and match their different elements to deliver more inclusive, transparent, accountable and deliberated political outcomes.

We need to understand that existing representative democracy isn't democratic but oligarchic – aiding the few at the cost of the many. We need to learn the skills to start and run our own political experiments where we live, to document the findings and share them with other changemakers. We need to lobby existing politicians – many frustrated changemakers themselves – to have them champion radical innovation to replace the failed status quo, even if it costs them their jobs.

We need to do all these things and more, at scale and fast. The prize, for people and our planet, will be fairer, more responsive, transparent and accountable political systems taking better decisions.

Simply put, it will be ***Way Deeper Democracy***.

# Vision

Public decision-making processes reflect citizens' informed views by way of responsive, transparent, accountable and inclusive processes. Political systems at all levels of government are profoundly more trustworthy and fit for purpose, easing societal tensions, fears and frustration.

# Goals

By 2027, six, sub-national government levels will be taking major political decisions using processes that directly reflect their publics' wishes, using mechanisms such as citizens' juries chosen by sortition.

By 2027, two nation-state governments will have in place legislative or revisionary chambers whose members are chosen by sortition in some form. One nation state will have a new constitution in place after a process that included randomly selected, deliberative juries to determine its main elements.

# Objectives

**ACT** – Partnerships are in place between the *Way Deeper Democracy* project and organisers of radically improved public decision-making processes around the world. Collective work includes gathering information and examples of experiments conducted and a pooling of accrued knowledge and practices. Together, these provide a base from which to advocate for, to create and to facilitate the scaling up of existing projects and the inception of new experiments elsewhere.

**LEARN** – A growing and well-informed public debate is underway on Western representative democracy and its historical context, all the way back to Ancient Greece and including those of other cultures. The poor quality of existing political outcomes are compared with the quality of those from more democratically innovative processes. A suite of free, open-access educational materials is available to facilitate the debate. Classroom materials give students the chance to experience directly the benefits of innovative processes, in school or university governments.

**KNOW** – A publicly accessible archive and website provides examples of radically improved public decision-making processes from around the world. It includes a database of projects, political analysis, articles and reflections on these new approaches to public decision-making.

**ADVOCATE** – Local and national decision-makers, helped by campaigners for better government, are aware of the potential for more inclusive, transparent and participatory decision making. They are advocating, and experimenting with, such approaches at local and national levels.

# Activities

**ACT** – partner up with leading proponents of innovative decision-making processes such as participatory budgets, and experimenters in sortition, exploring possibilities for mutual cooperation and collaboration. Record and catalogue these in the KNOW component of this programme. Encourage process documentation with a view to iteratively improving individual experiments and producing how-to manuals to help the seeding of experiments elsewhere. Help publicise experiments with conventional media outreach efforts, by training communities in citizen journalism techniques, encouraging the use of [constructive journalism](#) treatments.

**LEARN** – partner with existing educational materials providers – such as the [Zinn Education Project](#) – to promote and support the teaching of practical political thinking in middle schools, high schools, universities and to the public. Materials transmit the possibilities offered by improved public-decision making process. They encourage students to try them out for themselves, for example, [using sortition](#) to choose student council representatives, in place of elections. Combining theory and practice helps students embed a profound understanding of the “[democratic public goods](#)” that are responsive, transparent, accountable, inclusive, deliberative decision-making.

**KNOW** – build a database/archive/website showcasing experiments in improved public decision-making processes. Partner with and/or draw inspiration from the likes of [participedia](#), a collaborative research initiative aiming to help crowdsource, catalogue and compare participatory political processes around the world.

**ADVOCATE** – create multi-media journalism materials, including written articles and opinion pieces, to examine radically better public decision making. Work up a book and documentary to showcase and make real the impacts of such innovations in their host communities. Partner up with progressive news organisations, such as [De Correspondent](#) and [Positive News](#), and leading specialist blogs such as [Equality by Lot](#), to build conventional and social media momentum in support of radically improved public-decision making. Speak at specialist public events, to politicians, activists and civil society organisations, to make the case for such systems.

## **Budget**

Scoping phase – late 2016/early 2017

Inception - 2017

Initial execution – 2018/2019

Mature execution – 2020-2022

Conclusion and wrapup, or reiterate, including lessons learnt - 2023

## **Project Values**

The project **credo on what constitutes genuine democracy** imagines forms of government inspired by [Article 2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#). That implies governments operating for the people on their territories “without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex [including sexual orientation and gender identity], language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status”. Such governments would also operate with due consideration for the biosphere’s other species and the rights of future human generations. A long-term project outcome would be to rewrite UDHR Article 21 (3) as it relates to “periodic and genuine elections” so as to incorporate findings on more democratic alternatives.

The project’s **mode of operation** would draw on, and promote, applied ethical practices that encourage [peaceful, respectful speech and listening](#), leading to reconciliation and harmony. Specifically, that would mean working beyond, while not excluding, conventional politicians and political parties. It also means ignoring conventional notions of political “right” and “left”.

The project will use, and make clear its use of, [intrinsic frames to communicate](#) its work.

## **About the author**

[Patrick Chalmers](#) is a [constructive journalist](#), author, lecturer and campaigner focused on radically improving the quality of modern governments. He is a native Scot living in France.