



# Deliberative Democracy: A Policy Case for Institutional Reform in Greece

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HELLENIC FOUNDATION FOR EUROPEAN & FOREIGN POLICY (ELIAMEP)  
49 Vas. Sofias Ave., 10676, Athens, Greece  
Tel.: +30 210 7257 110 | [www.eliamep.gr](http://www.eliamep.gr) | [eliamep@eliamep.gr](mailto:eliamep@eliamep.gr)

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## **Savvas PAPADOPOULOS**

*Junior Research Fellow, ELIAMEP, PhD(c), Athens University of Economics & Business*

## **Spyros BLAVOUKOS**

*Head, EU Institutions & Policies Programme, Senior Research Fellow, ELIAMEP; Professor, Athens University of Economics & Business*

## **Myrto XANTHOPOULOU**

*Project Manager, DemoAct project, ELIAMEP*

## **Katerina Eirini LAMBRINOU**

*Institutional Capacity building lead of the DemoAct project, ELIAMEP*

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## Summary

Greece faces a democratic governance challenge with two dimensions: (a) low and declining citizens' trust in political institutions, and (b) limited citizens participation in policymaking between elections. Institutional data underline the urgency of the matter. Greece faces a dual governance challenge: chronically low trust in political institutions and limited citizen participation. Data from the OECD (2024) and the Eurobarometer (2023–2025) consistently show Greece falling back European averages.

Deliberative democracy presents a pragmatic institutional response: it convenes a broadly representative group of people, supports them to learn from evidence and varied perspectives, and enables structured deliberation that produces reasoned recommendations. International experience and standard setting show this approach is most useful for issues involving trade-offs and values disagreements, exactly the kind of issues that can otherwise become stuck in “consultation fatigue”, mistrust, or policy reversals (OECD, 2020).

The policy implication is clear: Greece needs deliberative processes with clear mandates, inclusion safeguards, and credible follow-up in order to restore participation rates and trust in government and institutions. European and international experience and practice converge on the same lesson: impact relies less on the implementation phase alone and more on setup as the mandate, governance, recruitment, evidence integrity, and follow-up as formal response, implementation pathway, and evaluation (Bertelsmann Stiftung & FIDE, 2025).

This policy brief features a comparative-institutional synthesis of European standard-setting processes (Council of Europe, 2023; European Commission, 2023), comparative evidence on the impact of deliberative practice on institutional trust, and documented case experience from selected European best practices. Drawing on this evidence base, it derives policy opportunities and ramifications for the Greek context. The analysis aims to identify principles associated with high-integrity deliberation and to translate them into actionable policy recommendations calibrated to Greek institutional realities.

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## Introduction

Decades of prolonged crises, institutional distrust, and deep social polarization have severely impacted public confidence. Greece currently faces a profound democratic governance challenge characterized by a dual crisis: chronically low and declining citizen trust in political institutions alongside limited public participation in policymaking between elections. Recent data from the Eurobarometer (2023–2025) and OECD (2024) illustrate this reality, consistently showing Greece trailing behind European averages. The indications are alarming in trust of the institutions, which poses a direct risk to the governability and resilience of essential long-term reforms.

In response to these challenges, deliberative democracy presents a pragmatic and effective institutional reform. This approach convenes broadly representative groups of citizens, equipping them to learn from evidence and diverse perspectives to produce reasoned policy recommendations through structured deliberation. International experience demonstrates that deliberative democracy is exceptionally valuable for navigating complex issues that involve difficult trade-offs and value disagreements, which might otherwise succumb to "consultation fatigue" or public mistrust. The objective of the current policy brief is to successfully restore civic participation and institutional trust, Greece must implement these deliberative processes with clear policy mandates, strong commitment and credible institutional mechanisms.

## PART A – Deliberative Democracy, Best Practices and Impact

### *What is Deliberative Democracy*

Deliberative democracy rests on four foundational theoretical contributions of Habermas, Cohen, Fishkin and Dryzek. Habermas (Fultner et al., 2011) provided the philosophical architecture acknowledging his democracy theory as “discourse theory of democracy”: democratic legitimacy grounded in the idea that citizens exchange reasons under conditions of equality, inclusion, and freedom from coercion. Cohen translated these foundations into an operational ideal, a deliberative democracy is “an association whose affairs are governed by the public deliberation of its members,” in which decisions result from reasons that all participants, as free and equal, can accept (Passerin D’Entrèves, 2000). Fishkin (2009) shifted the tradition from theory to empirical practice, combining random sampling, balanced briefings, facilitated small-group discussion, and before-and-after polling. Dryzek & Niemeyer (2010) introduced the concept of deliberative systems approach into democratic theory, warning that deliberative quality cannot be judged at the level of a single institution. In the context of deliberative systems, mini-public whose outputs never engage the wider political system is not deliberative democracy. Without outreach, uptake, and institutional response, deliberation remains politically incomplete. For the Greek context, this insight matters because the value of a local citizens’ assembly depends on whether its reasoning enters public discourse and the municipality’s decision cycle, not on the quality of internal deliberation alone.

The terms deliberative and participatory democracy are often used interchangeably, but the literature treats them as distinct traditions. Participatory democracy, formulated by Pateman (1970), emerged in the late 1960s as a critique of elite-driven liberal democracy and foregrounds the spheres in which citizens should exercise voice, with widespread participation valued for its educative and empowering effects. Both traditions reject minimal electoral democracy, but participatory democrats emphasize the institutional and socio-economic conditions of emancipation, while deliberative democrats emphasize the discursive conditions of legitimate decision-making (Escobar & Bua, 2025).

Deliberative democracy is best understood as a series of methods and institutions that enable informed, inclusive, and structured public reasoning that can improve policy decisions. It differs from ordinary consultation in three core ways. First, deliberative democracy typically uses representative selection (often through random selection with stratification) rather than self-selected participation, which tends to over-represent highly motivated groups and under-represent time-poor or marginalised communities. The OECD defines representative deliberative processes as involving group-based dialogue and debate aimed at finding common ground, using accurate, expert-informed information, with random selection and at least one full day of deliberation (OECD, 2025). Second, deliberation is not merely expressing preferences. It requires

learning and weighing trade-offs. Deliberative processes commonly include learning sessions with diverse evidence and opportunities for participants to interrogate claims and revise views based on reasons, not pressure (OECD, 2020). Third, deliberative democracy is policy-facing: it produces outputs intended to be processed by decision-makers under an agreed mandate and follow-up pathway. International standards emphasise that deliberative processes require clarity of mandate and accountability to safeguard integrity and effectiveness (Council of Europe, 2023).

### *The Politics of Deliberation in the European and EU context*

Political parties play a pivotal role in promoting democratic innovations, as they can act either as facilitators or as gatekeepers for the implementation of deliberation (Gherghina and Bettina Mitru, 2025). According to the literature and recent research, their decision to support or reject deliberative democratic processes is shaped by specific ideological and structural characteristics:

A multitude of studies observe a strong relationship between political ideology and the use of deliberative practices, with left-wing parties historically and practically favoring such processes (Pascolo, 2020; Viera et al., 2024). The most straightforward explanation for this is that it stems from an ideological commitment to values such as inclusivity, equality, and active citizen participation (Gherghina et al., 2024; Junius et al., 2020; Núñez et al., 2016). Conversely, right-wing parties generally tend to defend the status quo, preferring to maintain the dominance of strictly electoral, representative institutions over participatory reform (Bowler et al., 2006; Niessen, 2023). Nevertheless, recent research indicates that, given contemporary examples like the French case (2016), this ideological divide may no longer hold absolute. Ultimately, all governing parties can adopt deliberative processes to enhance the quality of the legislative process (Gherghina and Bettina Mitru, 2025). In the Greek political context, this debate has begun to be reframed not as a Left/Right dilemma but as a distinction between an “open” and a “closed” approach to governance, a framing that allows for cross-party convergence around deliberative practices.

The organizational structure and the “age” of a party are significant factors. Older parties, having formed prior to the era of major democratic reforms, possess traditional hierarchical structures and are often resistant to changes that affect power dynamics (Haughton and Deegan-Krause, 2020). They are less critical of the representative system, and their decision-making processes remain centralized. Even when traditional parties “open up” their internal processes to members (Hazan and Rahat, 2010), they rarely include meaningful deliberation. In contrast, new parties tend to adopt deliberative processes from the outset to strengthen their connection with the broader public.

Despite their tendency to constantly speak in the name of "the people," data confirms that populist parties rarely mention, let alone support, deliberative democracy. There is a fundamental incompatibility between the divisive rhetoric promoted by populists and the consensus-oriented approach that constitutes the core of deliberation (Gherghina and Mitru, 2025).

It is important to emphasize that the entire democratic spectrum can benefit from formal deliberative processes. These processes tend to improve the quality of decision-making while simultaneously strengthening social cohesion by building broader consensus and ensuring a fairer stake in both decision-making and the legislative process. Regardless of ideological identity or position, through the process of deliberation, citizens gain an active role in decision-making profiting not only the citizens, but also the legislative actors as political parties. This offers them the opportunity, within the institutional framework, to reduce the democratic deficit of representation through direct involvement in the decision-making process.

### *Comparative lessons from recent European practice*

#### European Organizations: EU and the Council of Europe

Europe's embrace of deliberative and participatory democracy is a matter of Union's resilience. The European Union is often criticised for making decisions without the involvement of its citizens, and Brussels is frequently perceived as distant, "too far". For this reason, it is essential for the EU to bring citizens closer to its institutions and decision-making processes. In this context, the European Union has explicitly framed citizen engagement as part of democratic renewal, including through the legacy of the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE). During the Conference, the largest exercise in participatory and deliberative democracy took place through three established pathways of participation: (i) multilingual digital platform (ii) European Citizens' Panels (iii) the plenary of the Conference on the Future of Europe. EU highlight that CoFoE concluded in May 2022 with 49 proposals and more than 300 measures, and that a major legacy has been the embedding of deliberative democracy in EU policymaking via new generation instrument of Citizens' Panels (Conference on the Future of Europe, n.d.). Although the way the Conference was organised and conducted, as well as the subsequent use of its conclusions, attracted considerable criticism (Alemanno, 2024), it nevertheless remains an undertaking that demonstrates the EU's intention to "invest" in such deliberative schemes (ELIAMEP, 2022a, 2022b).

Within the EU's wider "democratic innovation" agenda, the European Commission adopted a Recommendation on promoting the engagement and effective participation of citizens and civil society organisations in public policymaking (Recommendation (EU) 2023/2836). The Recommendation frames participation as part of democratic life, emphasising structured, inclusive, and enabling conditions for engagement rather than ad hoc practices (European

Commission, 2023). Alongside this, EU institutional capacity has expanded through the Joint Research Centre's Competence Centre on Participatory and Deliberative Democracy (CC-DEMOS), which provides guidance and tools for citizen engagement across policy settings (Homepage | COP CC on Participatory and Deliberative Democracy, n.d.)

European Citizens' Panels have thus become a core pillar of the European Commission's policy-making process. Since transitioning to a permanent fixture of EU democracy, the Commission has hosted roughly eight specialized panels on key topics ranging from food waste to the long-term budget. These panels have brought together over 1,200 randomly selected participants from all 27 Member States, with each panel composed of approximately 150 diverse citizens tasked with drafting formal policy recommendations. This deliberative model is highly important to the EU because it directly links European citizens to legislative planning, injects diverse public perspectives into complex topics like digital policy and budget allocation, and actively reinforces a more transparent, collaborative, and inclusive European democratic lifecycle.

Moreover, the Council of Europe adopted Recommendation CM/Rec (2023)6, described as the first international standard on deliberative democracy (Council of Europe, 2023), setting principles covering legal framework, mandate clarity, fair representation, and accountability. Its accompanying mapping work across member states documents how deliberative mechanisms are being used and provides practical guidance (including checklists) for policymakers designing deliberative initiatives (Council of Europe, 2022).

### National Practices

Ireland is widely discussed as a case of repeated, increasingly institutionalized constitutional mini-publics. 2016–18 Citizens' Assembly experience, highlight how deliberative design can connect to formal constitutional actions as well as linking deliberative democracy to direct democracy "referendums", and parliamentary pathways (Farrell et al., 2018).

France offers a different but equally instructive lesson. The Citizens' Convention on Climate brought together 150 randomly selected citizens and adopted 149 proposals in 2020, showing how deliberation can generate coherent packages of measures under a strong mandate (vie-publique.fr, 2020). Yet French public assessment underscores a central warning for Greece: deliberation's democratic value depends heavily on credible follow-through. The French Cour des comptes has emphasised the need for long-term informing and involvement of citizens and for the state to equip itself to manage and measure climate action under the Climate and Resilience Law that followed the Convention's work (Cour des comptes, 2024).

At the municipal level, the transformative trajectory of Paris under Mayor Anne Hidalgo offers a complementary lesson. By combining ambitious systemic goals, such as reclaiming the banks of the Seine, low-emission zones, and a transformation of traffic, with co-designed, smaller-scale interventions, the municipal authority used visible local wins as a trust-building mechanism. The

flagship “streets for schools” programme (rues aux écoles) was implemented around hundreds of schools through “co-design” workshops with parents, teachers, and local communities, encountering no resistance; on the contrary, it prompted parent groups in other neighbourhoods to request that the scheme be extended (Bloomberg Center for Cities, 2026). In parallel, public participation workshops were organised for major public spaces such as the Place de la Nation and the Place de la Bastille, while for other issues direct votes of residents were held. As Jorrit de Jong, Director of the Bloomberg Center for Cities at Harvard University, observes, this case shows that “setting ambitious goals and strong leadership from the top can go hand in hand with participatory decision-making.” That said, the Parisian model belongs primarily to the tradition of participatory rather than strictly deliberative democracy, as it rests neither on stratified sortition nor on structured mini-publics.

A third lesson comes from subnational and parliamentary practice with the collaboration between Civil Society and the State. The 2019 citizens’ assembly initiated by the National Assembly Commission for Wales provides concrete operational roadmap: a civic lottery (also known as sortition: random sampling from the general population, typically with stratification by demographic criteria to ensure representativeness, to participate in a deliberative body) and explicit exclusion rules covering Assembly staff, elected representatives, party employees, and employees of politicians. The Commission contracted two organisations to deliver the assembly on its behalf: the Sortition Foundation, which led participant recruitment of the participants and the Involve Foundation, which led all other aspects of the project and served as overall project lead (National Assembly for Wales, 2019).

Meanwhile in Belgium the most fully developed example of permanent structural reform, specifically in the German-speaking community (Ostbelgien), whose parliament voted in 2019 to create a standing Citizens' Council. Twenty-four randomly chosen citizens sit on the Council and are rotated out over 18 months, which keeps the body democratically renewed on a continuous basis. The Council holds a legal mandate both to choose the topics taken up by Citizens' Assemblies and to track, in a systematic way, how parliament and government act on the recommendations that emerge (Chwalisz, 2019). This represents the clearest case yet of deliberation being included into the architecture of the state itself, rather than being deployed as a one-off initiative.

Institutionalization can also take the form of giving citizens themselves the right to trigger deliberative processes. In the Austrian state of Vorarlberg, a citizens' council can be formally launched on the strength of 1,000 signatures (Chwalisz, 2019). The Polish city of Gdansk has gone further still, embedding citizens' assemblies in its municipal legal framework: once 5,000 signatures are gathered, the mayor is under a legal obligation to convene one. By tying deliberation to instruments of direct democracy, this approach sketches out a promising path for local government instruments (Chwalisz, 2019).

A further institutional route links deliberation directly to ballot-box decisions through the Citizens' Initiative Review (CIR), a model pioneered in Oregon (USA) and pilot implemented at Sion in Switzerland. A randomly selected panel of voters examines a live ballot measure and creates an official statement that lays out the central facts alongside the strongest arguments for and against it. This document is then distributed to every registered voter. Studies indicate that the CIR is an effective counterweight to misinformation and disinformation, and that it strengthens both the internal and external political efficacy of the broader electorate at the same time (Chwalisz, 2019).

### Greek Context

Greece has witnessed a gradual introduction of citizen participation experiments over the recent decades, offering a few concrete examples of deliberative democracy in practice. The most institutionalized national mechanism is the [opengov.gr](http://opengov.gr) platform, launched in 2009, through which draft legislation and government policy are posted prior to their submission to parliament. This enables citizens and organisations to submit comments and criticisms on an article-by-article basis (Deligiaouri, 2012). Scholarly assessment of this platform, while recognising its promise as a tool for e-rulemaking, has highlighted persistent gaps in feedback transparency and citizen mobilisation, with participation levels varying significantly across consultations (Deligiaouri, 2012; Karelis et al., 2026).

At the local level, participatory budgeting initiatives emerged in regions such as Western Macedonia and Central Greece through successive Open Government Partnership action plans, consistent with broader theoretical accounts of participatory budgeting as formal extension of public voice into political decision-making beyond the ballot box (Fung & Wright, 2001; Wampler, 2012). Two municipalities stand out as particularly innovative models of local participatory governance. The municipality of Thermi, designated as National Youth Capital for 2026, established its Youth Council (YouThermi) in June 2020 using a sociocratic, decentralised model of "local circles." This ensures that young people aged 15–29 across rural settlements have a direct voice in local decision-making, with the council serving as an official advisory body to the Municipal Council. Building on this foundation, DEMOTRUST's "Just Cities" programme, co-funded by the EU through the ECOALITY initiative and ActionAid-implemented twelve structured participatory processes across the Youth Municipal Councils of Thermi, Kalamaria, and Thermaikos. This enabled young citizens to co-produce social and environmental policies with direct outcomes for local governance, a model consistent with findings that well-designed youth participation in local bodies generates policy actions and orientations of elected officials (Saltiel & Sklias, 2023). The municipality of Larissa, meanwhile, was designated by UNESCO in 2019 as the network coordinator city for Citizenship Education within the Global Network of Learning Cities, subsequently investing in structured learning cycles through its Citizens' University and establishing one of the first Youth Municipal Councils in a Greek municipality. This trajectory culminated in the initiative "Democracy in Action: Innovative Deliberations and Citizen

Participation" (2022–2023), which earned Larissa a nomination for the European Innovation in Politics Awards 2024.

At the political party level, an early and significant instance was the 2006 Deliberative Poll conducted in Marousi. Designed and implemented in collaboration with Stanford University's Center for Deliberative Democracy, a representative sample of 153 citizens deliberated over six mayoral candidates on behalf of PASOK, marking the first application of Deliberative Polling to candidate selection anywhere in the world (Fishkin et al., 2008).

Taken together, and notwithstanding the observation that Greece's institutional landscape remains characterised by centralised decision-making and weak devolution of political authority to local actors (Roth et al., 2025), these cases illustrate an evolving ecosystem of participatory institutions that hold genuine promise and offer significant institutional space for deeper democratic renewal.

### *Measuring the Impact of Deliberation and Citizens' Assemblies*

Measuring the impact of deliberative democracy presents a highly complex challenge, primarily because deliberation must be evaluated and improved as a continuous system over time, rather than judged by a single, isolated event. According to the European Commission's Joint Research Centre, evaluation efforts are often erroneously limited to merely capturing participant satisfaction; however, the true necessity lies in systematically tracking institutional uptake, organizational learning, and measurable policy influence. Furthermore, preparation (set-up) and follow-up are explicitly identified as the most underestimated determinants of actual policy impact. This highlights that tangible outcomes do not materialize automatically but require visible governmental response, reasoned recommendations, and structured tracking mechanisms.

This difficulty is compounded by the requirement for long-term institutional commitment, as the democratic value of deliberative processes is heavily dependent on credible follow-through. For instance, in the aftermath of the French Citizens' Convention on Climate, the Cour des comptes emphasized the critical need for the state to adequately equip itself to manage, measure, and sustain long-term citizen involvement. Consequently, substantive impact is inherently difficult to quantify if deliberation is treated merely as a communications or public relations exercise. Instead, it demands to be embedded as a serious policy instrument designed to produce policy-relevant public judgment, improve the quality of decision-making, and build broader consensus over time.

The most concrete evidence of impact comes from cases where deliberative processes produced direct policy outcomes. Ireland provides the paradigmatic example. The Irish Citizens' Assembly (2016–2018) with 99 members chosen at random to reflect the Irish population in terms of age,

gender, social class, and geography (Farrel et al, 2018), deliberated on abortion across five weekends over five months, hearing from medical, legal, and ethical specialists as well as people offering personal testimony. In April 2017, 87% of assembly members voted to amend the Eighth Amendment, and two-thirds supported abortion access with no term limits. This directly led to the 2018 referendum that repealed the constitutional ban, resolving a decades-long political deadlock that electoral politics had been unable to break.

A systematic review of the literature on deliberative events, contextualised through a case study using four-wave panel data spanning 2.5 years, demonstrated that participants in deliberative events are more politically efficacious and trusting both prior to and after the deliberative event (Boulianne, 2019). At the community level, the spillover effects extend beyond direct participants. Research synthesising nearly 70 studies found consistent evidence of positive spillover effects among those who simply learn about the assembly process and recommendations, including increased trust in government and fellow citizens, and increased willingness of non-participants to engage in politics and consider alternate views (People Powered, 2026). The OECD's 2024 trust survey reinforces this link, identifying policies and mechanisms to promote effective and inclusive public engagement as key to boosting civic skills and enhancing trust in government (OECD, 2024).

Global research shows that citizens' assemblies can contribute to depolarisation by helping citizens with more extreme political views find common ground. Research on mini-publics in Poland found positive effects even in newer democracies with higher levels of political dissatisfaction and social polarisation (Setälä & O'Flynn, 2025; People Powered, 2026). A key finding from the literature is the transformative effect of deliberation on participants. Though typically pursued with instrumental aims, providing insight into refined public opinion on a difficult political problem, a beneficial side-effect is that mini-publics act as a "school of democracy." The experience of engagement has an impact on participants' sense of political agency, through the social benefits of engaging in civic life, knowledge benefits from understanding politics and policymaking better, or a combination of both (Boswell, 2021).

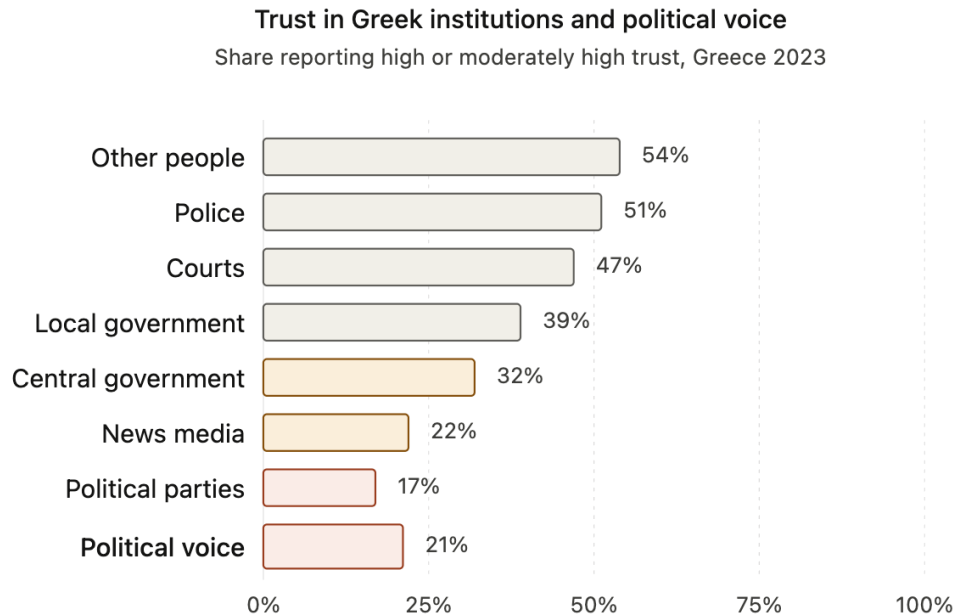
## PART B – Making the Case for Deliberative Democracy in Greece

### *Why Deliberation Matters for Greece*

#### Trust, voice, and governability

Low perceived political voice is a direct risk to governability: when people do not believe they can influence decisions, they are less likely to accept trade-offs, comply with reforms, or sustain policy commitments through difficult implementation periods. Greece presents a structurally distinct context for democratic innovation. Decades of institutional distrust, prolonged crises and deep social polarisation have eroded citizen confidence. According to the OECD, only 32% of Greeks trust government; only 21% believe the political system allows people like them to have a say, 9 points below the OECD average (see Figure 1). Those who feel excluded from political voice trust the central government 46% less than those who do proving that deliberative democracy is a powerful trust-repair mechanism. There is no established legal or procedural framework linking citizens' assemblies to formal decision-making: no municipal integration models, no accountability mechanisms, no trained cohort of policymakers as deliberative champions. Democratic deliberation in Greece remains episodic, donor-dependent and institutionally peripheral, not a reflection of civic disengagement, but of the absence of a scaling architecture: frameworks, methodology, advocacy, and pathways that could transform individual pilots into recognised, repeatable mechanisms of governance. At a time when the ground for deliberative democracy is shrinking across Europe, allowing it to grow in countries like Greece is essential for the whole continent.

The Greek profile displays a paradox that reinforces the deliberative argument. According to the Spring 2025 Eurobarometer, Greece ranks first among EU-27 member states in the frequency of discussing national (47%, against 26% for the EU-27), European (26%) and local (39%) matters, as well as on the index of political interest (36% against 20% for the EU-27). At the same time, democracy as a personal value is cited by 42% of citizens, the third highest score in the EU. Yet Greece simultaneously ranks last in the EU-27 in trust in the media (86% distrust), in the government (77%), in public services (73%) and in the health system (36%), and second to last in parliament (77%) and political parties (88%). This asymmetry between high political engagement and low institutional trust indicates neither apathy nor an aversion to politics, but rather the absence of institutional channels that convert available political energy into effective “voice in the system.”



Source: OECD Survey on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions (2024). Political voice measures the share who believe the political system lets people like them have a say.

*Figure 1*

Recent Eurobarometer data from Spring 2023 to Spring 2025 expand upon this bleak landscape, revealing a persistent and worsening downward trend in domestic institutional trust. Over this two-year period, the already limited confidence in the Greek national government declined further, dropping from 28% in 2023 (Eurobarometer, 2023) to just 24% by 2025 (Eurobarometer, 2025), while outright distrust surged to a staggering 74%. Similarly, trust in the national parliament experienced a sharp 10-point drop, falling from 30% to a mere 20%. This deepening domestic crisis starkly contrasts with the broader European trend, where trust in national governments and parliaments across the EU-27 experienced a slight upward trajectory (reaching 36% and 37%, respectively, in 2025). Even trust in the European Union, which traditionally scores higher than domestic institutions in Greece, fell to 37% by 2025, remaining significantly below the EU-27 average of 52%. This widening, continuous gap between citizens and their representative institutions underscores that the Greek trust deficit is not a static condition but an actively deteriorating trajectory, amplifying the urgent need for new, structured deliberative architectures to bridge the democratic divide.

## Policy complexity

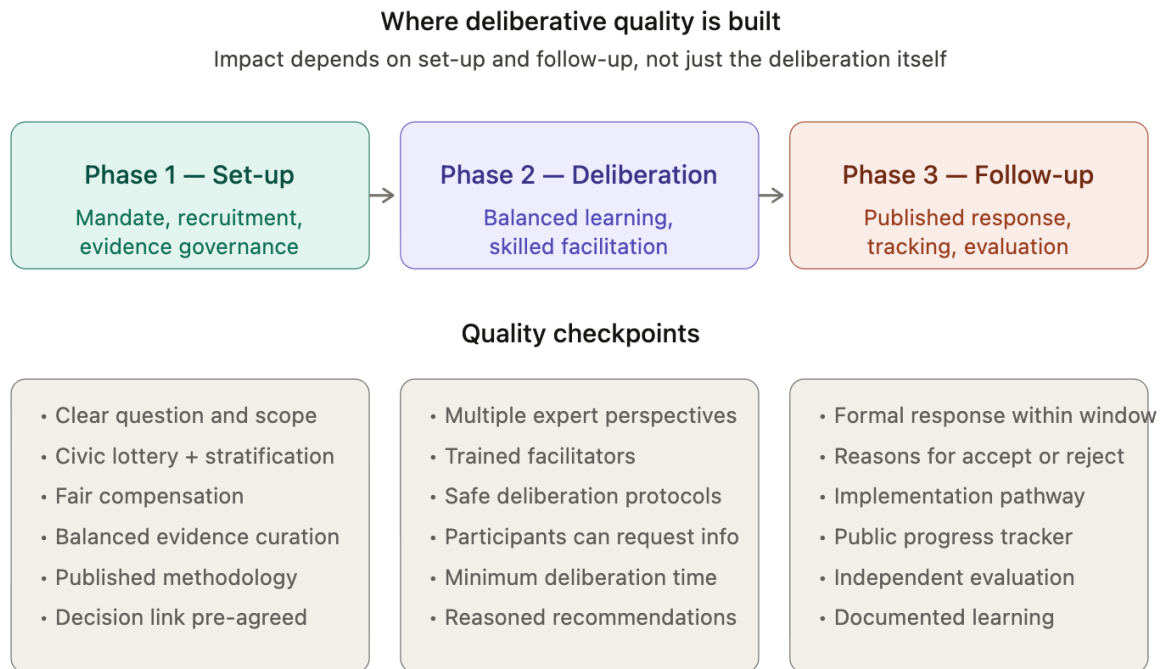
OECD comparative evidence suggests that representative deliberative processes have proliferated precisely because governments face complex problems involving trade-offs, where conventional politics struggles to sustain legitimacy (OECD, 2020c). For Greece, the operational question is which policy domains are most suited for deliberation-driven public judgment. High-quality deliberative processes are not a substitute for representative democracy. International standards stress that deliberative democracy is shaped to complement representative procedures by informing them and enhancing their legitimacy through structured citizen input, provided that mandates and accountability are clear (Council of Europe, 2023). The goal is not to bypass elected institutions and representatives but to strengthen decision-making quality and consent, particularly where conventional and often performative consultations produce low trust, low clarity, and weak feedback loops.

Deliberative democracy should be understood as an institutional mechanism, a way for public authorities and civil society to co-produce better decisions, reduce legitimacy gaps, and improve the quality of public discourse under conditions of complexity. In Greece, where a substantial share of citizens report limited political “voice” and relatively low trust in political institutions, the policy challenge is not only satisfaction with government (OECD, 2024), it is the resilience and governability of reforms in areas that require long-term commitment (for example, climate-friendly policies, social policy, digital transition, systemic reforms etc.). So, the adoption of deliberative practices is vital: it will transform the social consensus from passive acceptance towards active and stable commitment and ownership crucial for the success of long-term national goals.

## *Building Deliberative Processes in Greece*

The central policy choice for Greece is whether deliberation becomes a repeatable, standards-based capability or remains an occasional, personality-driven experiment. The recommendations below are therefore oriented toward: (i) quality and integrity (ii) credible follow-up and (iii) accumulation of learning.

Quality and impact are determined largely by what happens before and after deliberation, not only during it (see Figure 2). More specifically:



*Figure 2*

- The OECD “deliberative wave” evidence base synthesises good-practice principles and stresses that deliberative processes are especially useful for complex, values-based problems and long-term issues (OECD, 2020).
- Council of Europe standards and mapping highlight mandate clarity, fair representation, transparency, and accountability as central (Council of Europe, 2023)
- Bertelsmann Stiftung & FIDE (2025) explicitly argues that preparation (set-up) and follow-up are the most underestimated determinants of real policy impact, offering structured recommendations across phases (Stiftung B. & Federation for Innovation in Democracy, 2025)
- European Commission guidance on evaluating citizen engagement stresses systematic evaluation to ensure integrity, quality, and learning especially in a post-CoFoE context of expanded deliberative formats (CoP CC on Participatory and Deliberative Democracy, 2025)

The integrity of deliberative practice requires explicitly addressing four legitimate questions raised by policymakers themselves. First, the balance between randomness (sortition) and representativeness: stratification and fair selection must be publicly documented so that the lottery does not undermine the perception of representation. Second, the risks of topic selection: highly polarised issues or minority-rights issues require particular methodological care and safeguards, so that deliberation does not produce outcomes that undermine the very rights it is supposed to strengthen. Third, the absence of a deliberative culture: in Greece, educational processes preparing both citizens and policymakers are a necessary precondition, not an optional add-on. Fourth, and most crucially, follow-up to the citizen: legitimacy collapses if the participant does not perceive a tangible outcome of their participation. Recognising these risks does not weaken but strengthens the argument for a structured institutional architecture.

The dimensions outlined above crystallise into a set of design principles that international experience has shown to be decisive for the effectiveness of deliberative processes. The following table summarises these principles and translates them into concrete practical implications for the Greek context, taking into account both the structural features of the Greek political system and the documented requirements of good practice.

A comparative table of design principles and policy implications

Principle	Practical implication for Greece
Clear mandate and decision link	Specify what question is being answered, what outputs are expected, and how recommendations will be processed. (Council of Europe, 2023)
Representative recruitment	Use random selection with stratification, publish the method, provide fair compensation and supports to reduce drop-outs (OECD, 2025b)
Inclusion beyond demographics	Build in accessibility, childcare/care support, interpretation, and targeted outreach so inclusion is guaranteed, not symbolic. (FIDE, n.d.)
Evidence integrity and balanced learning	Establish an evidence curation approach, ensure balanced perspectives, provide materials in accessible formats, publish what was used (OECD, 2020).
Skilled facilitation and safe deliberation	Train facilitators, plan for group dynamics and high-emotion moments, define ground rules and escalation methods

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Principle	Practical implication for Greece
Transparency and communication	Communicate purpose, composition, and limits upfront, publish progress updates, enable public visibility without turning deliberation into performance.
Credible follow-up and tracking	Commit to a public awareness, a tracking mechanism, and reasons for acceptance/rejection of recommendations, assign administrative ownership (Bertelsmann Stiftung & FIDE, 2025).
Evaluation built in from the start	Independent evaluation plan, use mixed indicators.
Local government as a key engine	Use municipalities to pilot and normalise deliberative practice where policy issues are tangible (Gouache, 2020)
Institutional learning and scaling	Create a community of practice across national, regional and local level.

The design principles do not operate in isolation but form part of a sequence of interdependent stages that together make up the life cycle of a deliberative process. The following diagram (see Figure 3) captures this cycle in its four phases, (a) Preparation, (b) Design, (c) Assembly, and (d) Evaluation, highlighting both the internal logic of each phase and their succession as a single architecture of institutional accountability. This depiction serves a dual purpose: on the one hand, it makes clear that omitting any stage, and especially the underestimated phases of preparation and follow-up, undermines the legitimacy of the entire undertaking; on the other, it offers a practical reference tool for the actors undertaking the design of deliberative processes in the Greek context.

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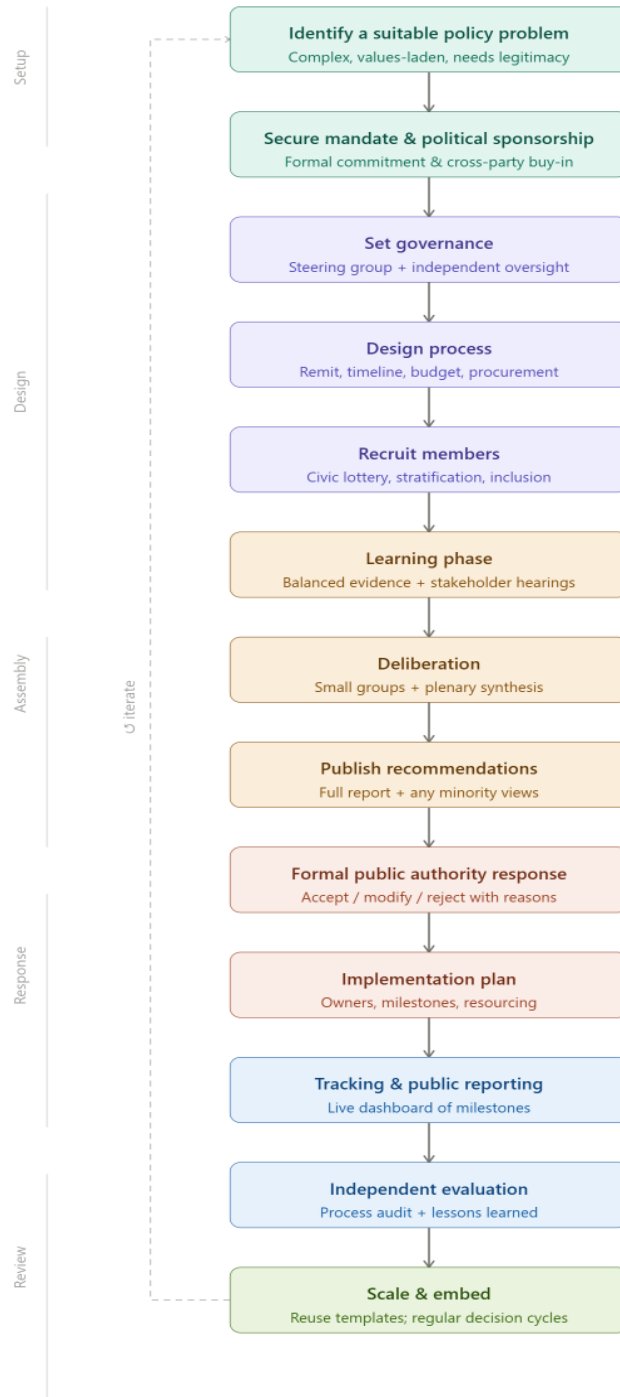


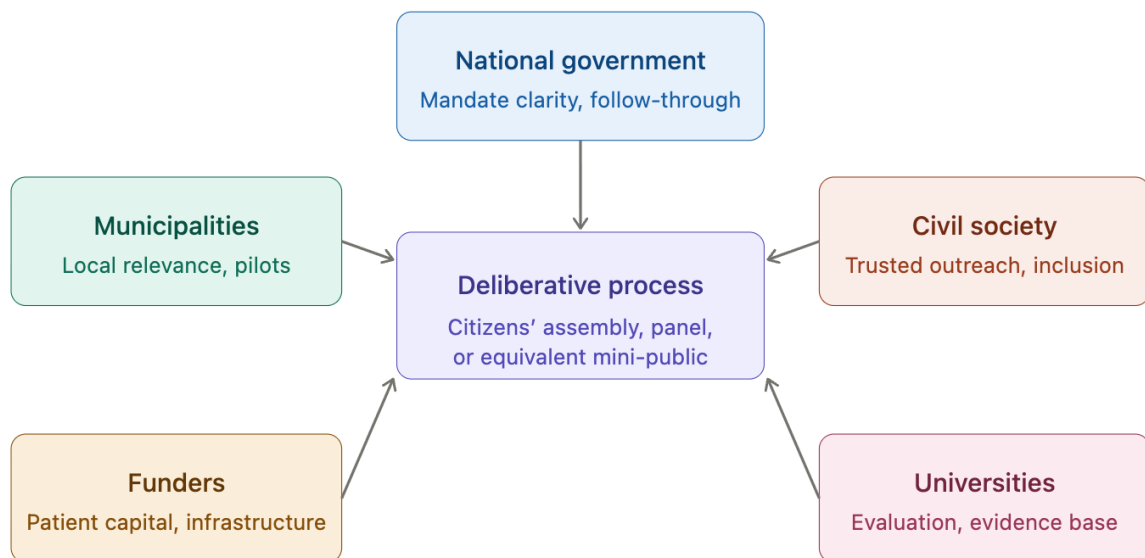
Figure 3

## Creating a Deliberative Ecosystem in Greece: Actors and Institutional Roles

Examining the deliberative ecosystem reveals five potential groups for implementing relevant initiatives (see Figure 4), which bear distinct but complementary responsibilities so that deliberative democracy functions as a system and not as a series of isolated or one-off events. Each group bears a distinct but complementary responsibility in making deliberative democracy function as a system rather than a series of isolated or one-off events. The unifying principle across all five groups is that quality, accountability, and sustainability must be designed in from the outset, they cannot be retrofitted after a process has run its course. For Greece in particular, building this infrastructure incrementally through local pilots is more realistic and more durable than a top-down national mandate without organizational capacity.

### Five interdependent roles in a deliberative system

Weakness in any single link undermines the whole



### The unifying principle

Quality and accountability must be designed in from the outset  
— they cannot be retrofitted after a process has concluded

Figure 4

## National Government and Parliament

National authorities set the rules of the game. Their role is to establish standards, guarantee follow-through, and build the central capacity that enables the rest of the system to function. It is recommended that they:

- Adopt a national deliberative quality framework aligned with Council of Europe principles and OECD good practice, clarifying minimum standards on mandate, recruitment, evidence integrity, transparency, and accountability (Council of Europe, 2023; OECD, 2020).
- Build a small central capability, a dedicated "deliberation unit" or cross-ministerial support function - that can provide ministries and regions with procurement templates, recruitment standards, and evaluation commissioning, mirroring EU-level capacity-building logic (European Commission, n.d.).

## Municipalities and Local Government

Local authorities are the most promising engines of institutional learning, since policy cycles are shorter and issues more tangible. They are where "voice with consequences" can be demonstrated most convincingly. Accordingly, it is recommended that they:

- Prioritise local deliberative pilots on issues where the decision cycle is clear and outcomes are visible to residents (Gouache, 2022).
- Ensure recruitment legitimacy through civic lottery(sortition), stratified sampling, and publicly documented methodology, combined with practical inclusion supports (compensation/per diems, childcare, interpretation) so that deliberation is not dominated by those already politically active.
- Embed facilitation training in municipal capacity-building programmes, treating facilitation as a professional function with defined standards rather than an ad hoc skill assigned to whoever is available.

## Civil Society Organisations

Civil society links the gap between institutions and communities that may distrust government-led participation. Their credibility depends on maintaining independence from both commissioning authorities and partisan politics. In this context, organisations are called upon to:

- Act as trusted connectors for outreach and inclusion, especially with communities sceptical of state-led initiatives, explicitly including trade unions as an organised segment of civil society with a systematic presence and intermediary capacity. Align outreach efforts with safeguards that preserve the independence of recruitment (Bertelsmann Stiftung & FIDE, 2025).

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- Support follow-up through public accountability mechanisms, transparent trackers, civic monitoring, and independent reporting without allowing deliberation to be captured by partisan interests (European Commission – Joint Research Centre, 2025).

### Universities and Researchers

Academic institutions generate the evidence base that allows deliberative practice to be assessed, refined, and defended against criticism. This role can be specified as follows:

- Co-design evaluation frameworks that are both credible to policymakers and useful to practitioners, tracking not only participant satisfaction as well as institutional uptake, organisational learning, and measurable policy influence (European Commission – Joint Research Centre, 2025).
- Include deliberation practices in their own decision making as a key aspect of their strategy for community engagement and understanding.
- Contribute to evidence governance by developing accessible evidence briefings, mapping stakeholder perspectives, and documenting Greek deliberative practice systematically, building a domestic evidence base that reduces dependence on comparative inference from other jurisdictions (Council of Europe, 2022).

Across all five stakeholder groups, a common architecture emerges. Deliberative democracy succeeds when mandate clarity (government), local relevance (municipalities), trusted outreach (civil society), and strict evaluation (academia) work together. A weakness in any single link compromises the entire system. For Greece, the strategic question is not whether to adopt deliberative practices, but whether all five roles can be populated with sufficient capacity and coordination for the practice to become durable. The recommendations above are therefore interdependent rather than optional, partial adoption risks producing the very "symbolic participation" that high-integrity deliberation is meant to replace.

### *Future course of Action*

The opportunity for Greece is to treat deliberative democracy as a serious democratic infrastructure investment aligned with European standards, capable of producing policy-relevant public judgment, and designed for repeatability.

Three conditions are decisive. First, deliberation must be anchored in real decision pathways. Irish and French experience both demonstrate that deliberation can shape major agendas, but that its reputation is damaged when follow-up is weak or ambiguous. (Farrell et al., 2018) Second, Greece should build from local pilots toward scalable practice, using local governments as engines of institutional learning. Third, deliberation should be evaluated and improved as a system over time, not judged by a single event.

## *The DemoAct Project*

DemoAct (“Democracy in Action”) is implemented by Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy (ELIAMEP) and funded through the EU-supported PLATO programme, with the Bodossaki Foundation as the managing foundation.

DemoAct aims to strengthen democratic consultation models with active participation of institutions, aspiring to integrate citizen consultation methods into public administration and civil society, and to close gaps between society and institutions by improving participation and policy decision-making quality. DemoAct is not only advocacy for deliberation but an applied intervention with at least three practical pillars:

- building a policy-maker network to facilitate dialogue with institutions and to shape conditions for sustainable adoption of deliberative practices.
- organizing a citizens’ assembly.
- delivering capacity-building workshops with civil society and academic partners

Partners include the European University Institute - School of Transnational Governance, FIDE Europe and the Council of Europe.

Its ambition is to support the sustainable integration of citizen consultation methods into public administration and civil society (ELIAMEP, 2026). If Greece embraces deliberation as a serious policy instrument (not a communications exercise), it can help shift participation from episodic and polarised contention toward informed, inclusive, and action-oriented public involvement.

DemoAct can play a constructive “bridge” role in this strategy-linking European standards and know-how to Greek institutional realities through a network, a concrete local citizens’ assembly, and capacity building.

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