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Trust in governments and public institutions around the world is fragile; fewer than 10% of the world's population now live in full democracies and that figure is falling.² Declining faith in government enables authoritarian leaders to emerge. Even entrenched democracies face fundamental risks stemming from political short-termism in the face of increasingly complex challenges. While each jurisdiction is different, it is a global pattern than , levels of division polarisation are turning many away from democratic politics and public service.³

Governments everywhere are facing a globalised world, many of the issues facing them cannot be solved by governments alone. Increasingly this means governments are asking people to change what they do individually for the good of us all. The most stark examples are the pandemic and the climate emergency, but you could also highlight pollution, biodiversity, migration, poverty, drugs


misuse and human rights as well as unchecked development of digital technology (for good and ill) all transcend borders yet will affect every individual on the planet.

A step change is needed if these are to be sufficient and focused ways of involving people in decision making. Done well, it can help deliver improved outcomes and better policy, and can help fulfil the Government's commitments to equalities and human rights. It can also help counteract polarisation and disinformation - moving us away from adversarial debate to an approach which builds consensus, bridges divides and takes difficult decisions on complex issues. Done badly, it can undermine equalities and human rights, and further damage trust in government.

Within Democracy R&D we are largely convinced of the value of Citizen Assemblies but we should not assume governments and public servants will share that understanding. The benefits of using participatory and deliberative approaches for governments and public institutions need to be set out - they include:



2. [Home - Civicus Monitor](#) records the changing levels of democratic representation
3. *Inevitably what I write will be influenced by living in a place (Scotland) that has been caught up in the maelstrom of the democratic process in the UK in recent years, with the outcomes of elections and, in particular, referenda leading to a drop in trust between governments and the population -*

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- Understanding public perspectives, especially on emerging and complex issues such as:
 - ▶ long-term issues, especially those that have reached an impasse
 - ▶ values-based dilemmas, especially where public opinion is polarised
 - ▶ Contentious issues that involve trade-offs but are not binary choices
 - Taking difficult decisions on such issues with informed public support
 - Providing a better-informed public by publicising outcomes of forum deliberation and fostering mass discourse on issue, or involving mass deliberation directly into the process
 - Building public trust in government and demonstrating to the public that they are listened to

These benefits are increasingly recognised in both the public and third sectors. For example, the OECD includes participation of the public and stakeholders as a core requirement of open governments and identifies this as key to rebuilding trust and reinforcing democracy; as does the European Commission's recommendation on promoting the engagement and effective participation of citizens and civil society in public policy making issued in December 2023.⁴ This is an approach which has been led by practitioners in private and non-profit organisations or academic institutions, and calls for skills that are not necessarily prevalent or highly valued by those in public service.⁵



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4. [Building Trust and Reinforcing Democracy: Preparing the Ground for Government Action | en | OECD C_2023_8627_1_EN_ACT_part1_v7.pdf \(europa.eu\)](#) European Commission recommendation on promoting the engagement and effective participation of citizens and civil society in public policy making, 12th December 2023
 5. *Exceptions to this pattern include countries like Ireland, Scotland, and Singapore where capabilities around deliberative engagement have been primarily developed inside the public service.*