



# Convention of the Future Armenian

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## The Story

The Convention of the Future Armenian is unique in a number of ways: its topic focused on identity and culture rather than a political issue; it included people of Armenian culture from across the world and sought to be reflective of the global Armenian population (which therefore offered unique applications of sortition and ideals of representativity); and its own definition of institutionalization relied on the idea of permanence rather than embedding itself into a governmental or otherwise decision-making body.

Armenia is in a precarious position geopolitically with regards to its own politics and economy, as well as socially and culturally as many Armenians no longer live in Armenia. The Convention was initiated by the Future Armenian Development Foundation to allow “Armenians to collectively address the challenges they face.”<sup>1</sup> After commissioning, the Foundation contracted Iswe, a UK-based public engagement organization, to support development and implementation. In conversations between Iswe and the Foundation, it became clear that they wanted to develop a permanent governance infrastructure to provide strategy for the country on this front. Subsequently, Iswe designed and delivered the process in collaboration with facilitators on the ground in Armenia.

## The Model

### *Institutional linkage*

The Convention aimed, from the beginning, to establish a “permanent piece of Armenia’s governance infrastructure.”<sup>2</sup> The process was civil-society initiated and run; rather than docking into government, the aim was to establish permanence through cultural and social means.


### *Deliberative process & recruitment*

The convention adopted what it called a “hybrid approach” combining the 21st Century Town Meeting model (creating a singular political moment) with a citizens’ assembly (doing so by using sortition and deliberation).<sup>3</sup>

The Foundation began the participant selection process through public outreach efforts, like newsletters, social media campaigns, and broadcast media. In order to attract “less politically engaged”<sup>4</sup> participants, the Foundation also held more than 20 online and in-person introductory discussions across the Armenian diaspora, with the hope that this would also increase word-of-mouth knowledge of and interest in the Convention. The Foundation



1. <https://futurearmenian.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/CFA-Report-eng-web.pdf> page 24.
2. *Ibid.*
3. *Ibid*, page 33.
4. *Ibid*, page 39.



reached out to representatives of Armenian communities across the world to reach members of the diaspora. The demographic selection criteria chosen for this Convention was gender, age, education level, and geography.

Geography was further broken down as follows to account for representativeness across the diaspora: Armenia, Artsakh, and Diaspora, with the first two accounting for rural, urban, and certain ethnic groups, and the latter accounting for representativeness for country of residence. Because of geopolitical challenges and certain specificities of the nature of Armenian identity, the ultimate group of participants was not rigidly representative of the population on certain fronts. For example, it is estimated that the number of Armenians living outside of Armenia is double those who are, but representatives of the diaspora were allotted fifty percent of the total number of participants in order to allow for equal representation of those living in other countries and those living in Armenia and Artsakh. Additionally, residents of Artsakh were overrepresented to give emphasis to the struggles of the Armenians living there, as well as to give them an influential voice.<sup>5</sup>

Three Expert Committees were formed to follow the three thematic goals of the Convention. These Committees were responsible for creating the framing questions of deliberation, providing material and resources for discussion, and advising on the selection of speakers, among others.<sup>6</sup> The deliberation topics of the Convention were centered on three goals: historic responsibility, growing population,

and Armenia-Diaspora unity. These three goals were selected by survey respondents from around the world as the three goals from an original list of fifteen that should be prioritized for this Convention.<sup>7</sup>

## Insights from this case

### ***Permanence as the basis of institutionalization***

Permanence of the convention was the crux of this deliberative event's definition of "institutionalization." For the designers of this process, the idea of a permanent and recurring, civil society-originated deliberative event solves some problems that the field of deliberative democracy and public participation have run into. For a number of reasons, governments tend to limit the scope and remit of deliberative events "in deeply problematic ways," our interview partner said. Formulating citizen deliberation to take place outside of the halls of government allows for ambitious and politically unencumbered discussion. Additionally, governments do not always have enough money and resources to successfully do deliberation. Galvanizing communities to do this work is important.

### ***Society-wide outreach***

What was most innovative about this Convention, as our interview partner said, was the emphasis on outreach: organizers got the Church, the media, government, and industry leaders to constitute what they called the "Affiliation



5. *Ibid*, page 41.

6. *Ibid*, page 48.

7. *Ibid*, page 22.

8. *Ibid*, page 35.



Network.” The aim of Affiliation Network was to assemble a group of influential organizations and people who could ensure that the recommendations and proposals from the Convention were “carried [sic] forward.”<sup>8</sup> This provided the civil society-run assembly with a docking body. Where a governmentally-commissioned deliberative event would be docked to a legislative body, the Convention was accountable to and supported by a wide-reaching network of people that represented all factions of Armenian society. While the final report does not make explicit if members of the Network included representatives of government, it does make clear that the role of governments is a discussion being had between the government, the Network, and the Foundation. This model can be seen as a template for how a deliberative body can create structure outside of a government.

### ***Deliberation in a post-conflict context***

The Convention concluded just under three years after the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War (2020). The immediacy of this conflict, however, represents only the most recent iteration of war in Armenia. This Convention took place against the backdrop of the Armenian Genocide and the subsequent conflicts that have lasted decades. Central to the Foundation’s work is to bring together Armenians in discussions that address “tensions and promote reconciliation after the war.”<sup>9</sup> Deliberation in post-conflict areas is a yet relatively unexplored frontier of deliberation. The Convention of the Future Armenian provides a model for how deliberation can take place transnationally along issues of identity, sustainable development, and unity.



8. *Ibid*, page 35.

9. [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1mEEHJE-LBOD6yNCbyV3tOxZ\\_gpU89t1S/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1mEEHJE-LBOD6yNCbyV3tOxZ_gpU89t1S/view) slide 7.



## References

- The Future Armenian. 2023. *Report of the Convention* in [this link](#)
- Democracy R&D. n.d. *The Future Armenian Foundation* in [this link](#)