

If citizens have a voice, who's listening? Lessons from recent citizen consultation experiments for the European Union

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In June EPIN published previous Working Paper No. 24 If citizens have a voice, who's listening? Lessons from recent citizen consultation experiments for the European Union by Stephen Boucher, Programme Director at the European Climate Foundation.

Are European Union institutions, as they claim, really listening to citizens thanks to more 'deliberative' consultation tools? The European Commission and the European Parliament in particular have committed themselves to engaging in a dialogue with citizens in recent years. But to what effect?

This paper notes how official policies have adopted language borrowed from the deliberative democracy school of thinking, but denounces the lack of clarity in the role assigned to deliberation with citizens in EU policy-making processes. It also invites EU policy-makers to think more critically about recent and future experiments that present themselves as 'deliberative'. It does so by highlighting areas for improvement in recent initiatives.

Finally, it makes a number of recommendations for the future of dialogue with citizens, suggesting in particular the creation of a European Observatory for Democracy and Opinion, as well as a list of criteria to assess the design and role of such activities, and the concentration of efforts on one high-quality, highimpact initiative per year.

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