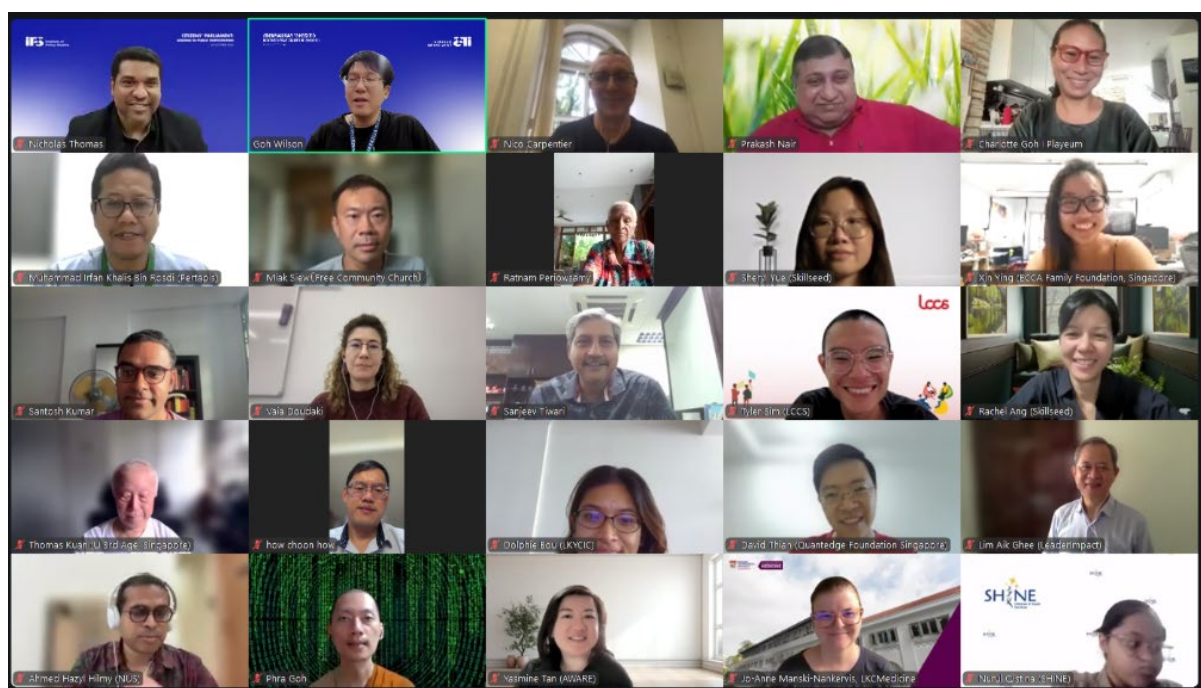


Czech Citizens' Parliament on Media and Democracy: Lessons in Public Participation

By Nicholas Thomas



Caption for photo: Discussion between the speakers and participants

“Participation is co-decision-making, a form of power sharing, not merely taking part.” – Extraordinary Professor Nico Carpentier

Overview and Speakers

The IPS Policy Lab convened an online webinar on 24 October 2025 to glean lessons from the Czech Citizens' Parliament on Media and Democracy. Nearly 100 participants from the people, public and private sectors, as well as academia and individual citizens, attended. The session connected democratic theory to the practical realities of process design and implementation.

Extraordinary Professor Nico Carpentier and Associate Professor Vaia Doudaki, both from Charles University in Prague, outlined the conceptual foundations and presented the Czech

Citizens' Parliament on Media and Democracy. They then answered questions from participants in a Q&A session. Nicholas Thomas, Research Fellow at the IPS Policy Lab, moderated the session.

Czech Citizens' Parliament Design

The speakers framed democracy as a continual balance between **participation** — the exercise of power by a community, and **representation** — the delegation of power to elected actors. They defined participation as co-decision-making; and by this Euro-centric standard, not all engagement activities qualify as participation. The key test is whether citizens share decision rights.

To translate principle into practice, the Czech Citizens' Parliament deliberated the nexus between media and democracy across three areas, namely, media systems, media representation and media participation. An advisory council of civil society and media organisations provided outreach and legitimacy. The team recruited participants voluntarily but structured selection for diversity by region, age and gender, using an intake survey and interviews, with an explicit filter for willingness to engage constructively.

Participants levelled knowledge through short learning videos and readings. Crucially, citizens set their own rules, adopting a two-thirds qualified majority threshold for recommendations. This encouraged broad consensus while enabling decisions. The deliberation used a World Cafe method with a table host for continuity. The process unfolded over four sessions, incorporated local context and experts, and embedded iterative loops to keep deliberations inclusive.

Outputs and Themes

The Czech Citizens' Parliament produced 51 proposed resolutions and adopted 31 by qualified majority. The themes spanned six key areas — diversity and inclusion, media literacy and education, support for local and community media, strengthening journalism, funding for public media, and ethics and accountability. To protect pluralism, participants appended confirmatory and dissenting remarks to adopted resolutions, preserving minority perspectives alongside majority outcomes.

Process Integrity and Lessons

The Czech research team managed several persistent tensions to preserve process integrity. They welcomed expert input and moderated it, so experts informed rather than steered deliberation. Time remained tight, so facilitators combined clear structure with flexible adjustments to give trust and proposals room to develop. A notable strength was participant self-regulation. Citizens co-developed shared norms and regulated imbalances when some voices grew too dominant, which showed that ownership had taken root.

Post Process Linkages

Despite the process, the speakers highlighted the difficulty of turning citizen outputs into policy. The team briefed the Czech Senate and contacted the European Parliament, yet political institutions have no obligation to act. Achieving policy change requires sustained relationships, follow through and linking social capital that extend beyond a single process.

Question and Answer Session

On the question of power distribution by design, the speakers urged constant attention to actors, inputs and micro-decisions, including who set agendas and rules, how information flowed, when votes occurred and what thresholds applied. Participation that did not shift decision rights, in their view, remained symbolic.

On the possibility of a Children's Parliament — or more broadly children's participation for ages six to 12 — the speakers affirmed that children were citizens with distinct needs. They added that organisers should consider additional elements such as power asymmetries, topic relevance, capacity-building, accessibility and parental engagement, so that participation remained meaningful rather than tokenistic.

Questions on minority inclusion highlighted risks in relatively homogeneous contexts. The Czech process mitigated these through diversity-oriented recruitment, agenda space for under-represented concerns and a formal mechanism to record dissenting statements alongside adopted resolutions.

Concerns about hijacking by dominant voices were addressed through clear ground rules, light-touch but trained facilitation, time-boxed rotations and, most importantly, participant-led self-correction when discussions drifted or individuals over-claimed airtime.

Participants asked whether participatory processes could rebuild trust in contexts marked by collective or intergenerational trauma. The speakers cautioned that participation could aid conflict transformation only when it acknowledged pain and redistributed power. Otherwise, it risked re-traumatisation or manipulation. Trust was foundational and took time to build.

Finally, on conditions for success, the speakers pointed to inclusive recruitment, transparent rules, iterative design, sufficient time for trust and credible institutional pathways after the event. They noted that success was multidimensional. Beyond outputs, it included whether citizens co-managed their deliberation and whether channels carried outcomes into policy arenas.

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