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Future Proofing Democracy

The principles of justice are chosen behind a veil of ignorance.
John Rawls, Theory of Justice, 1971.

A common charge levelled against democracies is that their decisions prioritise the present over the future. For some environmentalists, democracies are also seen as at fault for failing to deal with issues such as environmental change and global warming that require long-term policymaking. Campaigner James Lovelock spoke for many when he argued:

Even the best democracies agree that when a major war approaches, democracy must be put on hold for the time being. I have a feeling that climate change may be an issue as severe as a war. It may be necessary to put democracy on hold for a while.¹

Iñigo González-Ricoy and Axel Gosseries (2016) add to the list of areas of failure in long-term policymaking:

An excessive focus on the short term is especially problematic in policy domains with an extended timeframe, such as environmental sustainability, investment in blue-sky research, pension system reform, population control, or nuclear waste management. Since these are domains that typically require costly action in the short term (e.g. increasing taxes, cutting benefits, imposing regulatory burdens) with benefits only arriving in the long run, democratic institutions are too often tempted to pass such costs on to the next generations, thus failing to adopt the required policies.²

Democracies as political systems struggle to deliver to deliver long-term policy goals ‘that require governments to arrange losses and gains in a particular temporal order: to impose social costs long before most benefits will arrive’.³

Beyond a practical concern that democracies may be neglecting vital issues that require long-term action is the idea that democracies are inherently and irredeemably victims of ‘presentism’, and as such normatively fail to match their concern with citizens in the here-and-now with a concern for citizens in the future. They are failing in the terms of public philosopher, Roman Krznaric, to act as “good ancestors”. His deep moral concerns about neglecting our responsibilities for the future are expressed in a powerful way:

When Britain colonised Australia in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it drew on a legal doctrine now known as terra nullius – ‘nobody’s land’ – to justify its conquest and treatment of the indigenous population as if they didn’t exist or have any claims on the land. Today our societal attitude is one of tempus nullius. The future is seen as ‘nobody’s time,’ an unclaimed territory that is similarly devoid of inhabitants. Like the distant realms of empire, it is ours for the taking. Just as indigenous Australians still struggle against the legacy of terra nullius, so too there is a struggle to be had against the doctrine of tempus nullius.⁴

The practical concerns about how to avoid an impending climate crisis when mixed with the moral imperative to act to save future populations encourages many to argue that the only way

forward is to take decisions out of the control of democratic politics. The future demands less democracy.

In contrast, this chapter argues that it is possible to future proof democracy and the future demands better democracy not less. We start by challenging the idea that democracies are inherently and irredeemably victims of ‘presentism’⁵, always short-term, driven by the demands of voters and the desire for politicians to get themselves re-elected by showing quick results. Democracies in the last decades have performed better in focusing on inter-generational concerns than autocratic systems. Many of those who claim that democracies simply cannot do long-term policy making build their case on over-exaggerated claims about the tendency of both citizens and politicians to always discount the future. There is no denying that pressures towards short-termism exist but there are balancing forces that also need to be considered.

Our argument is that there is hope and a prospect for reform of democracies. To tackle short-termism requires a better understanding of its causes. These concerns occupy the second section of the chapter. The causes of democratic myopia are complex as solutions are not easy to find and face several significant hurdles. But the path to reform is already being trodden and the third section of the chapter outlines some of these reform practices and makes a general argument for those that encourage a different dynamic to democratic politics rather than seeking to limit its decision making scope and influence. We need to tip the balance in democratic practice towards better regard for the future but in a way that allows for political disagreement and conflict. Whether you are 18 or 80 years of age you have the same responsibility to act as a “good ancestor” but how to act on that responsibility could be a legitimate matter of disagreement and should be the focus of democratic debate and political challenge.

Are democracies inherently myopic?

There are good reasons to argue that democracies need to learn to better balance short-term and long-term concerns, but it does not follow that democracies are inherently and irredeemably myopic in outlook. Too many of the arguments that democracies are short-termist operate with an overly simplistic model of democracy and the motivations of its actors. One of the most famous examples is offered in the work of William Nordhaus (2018) but is based on a stylised model of a representative democracy, a one-dimensional rational choice model which views politicians and voters as driven by self-interested calculation. Voters will judge parties on their performance in delivering for them in the short run and incumbent politicians are therefore under irresistible pressure to deliver short-term gains or risk being voted out of office. As a result, democracies ‘will make decisions biased against future generations’.⁶ In terms of public spending a predictable pattern is ‘policy, starting with relative austerity in early years and ending with the potlatch right before the elections’.⁷

The Nordhaus model has received serious attention and multiple developments but it is based on “a rationality trap” where, given assumptions that actors have full information and act in a self-interested manner, there appears no way out of the social dilemma identified. They will be short-term in their actions. To break from its grip is not too hard. All that needs to be done is recognise that democracy and people’s motivations are more complicated than the model allows. Democracy is not just about individual citizens and politicians. It involves organised interests who may be willing to think and act long-term in the right circumstances. Democracy is also a form of government that involves multiple agencies and actors who have roles that are tied into thinking long-term. At one end of the spectrum there are future forecasting and

planning units and at the other end, public institutions would not be recognisable without their three or five or ten year plans or units that look forward to various potential scenarios over a longer-term time horizon, often decades ahead. As part of the regular business of government issues are dealt with over different time horizons from policies aimed at fiscal sustainability or responsibility to those that are considered over a few years (e.g. tax benefits) or decades (e.g. pensions), to nuclear waste management policies, which may extend to several centuries.

Citizens themselves also have motivations that stretch beyond simple self-interest. People do think about collective concerns and also along moral or normative lines. Moreover, their reasoning is rarely fixed. As Michael McKenzie observes, ‘If individuals (or groups) have moderate but adjustable preferences for the near term, as opposed to strong and inflexible ones, some of the causes of short-termism in our political systems may be (more or less effectively) addressed through institutional design’.⁸

We are not denying the pressures to short-termism but suggesting that they can be and to a degree already are countered. As Roman Krznaric comments ‘the capacity to think and plan over long timespans is wired into our brains and has enabled monumental feats such as the construction of London’s sewers after the Great Stink of 1858, the public investment of Roosevelt’s New Deal, and the dedicated struggles of anti-slavery campaigners and advocates for women’s rights’.⁹ Politics in democracies is strewn with examples of how long-term thinking and action have made a difference with governments, civil servants and campaigners all contributing to the achievements of actions that may have involved some short-term sacrifice but delivered long-term benefits.

Beyond these sighting shots it is vital to recognise that if autocratic government is the alternative to democracy then there is strong evidence to indicate it is not the panacea when it comes to inter-generational justice. Putting democracy ‘on hold’ to tackle climate change, as James Lovelock proposes, does not guarantee success. Comparing nations and their political systems is an exercise fraught with difficulties. But one sophisticated attempt to do so is provided by Roman Krznaric, in cooperation with Jamie McQuilkin. They develop an Intergenerational Solidarity Index (ISI) that is a composite of indicators of long-term policy practice in the environmental, social and economic realms. The results are startling: out of the countries with the 25 highest scores on the ISI, ‘21 of them – 84 per cent – are democracies. Out of the countries with the 25 lowest scores on the ISI, 21 are autocracies. Out of all 60 democracies, 77 per cent are long-term democracies, while out of all 62 autocracies, only 39 per cent are long-term autocracies. The average intergenerational solidarity score for democracies is 59 while the average for autocracies is just 42’.¹⁰ The measures and methods used could be challenged but they are more sophisticated than cherry-picking examples of nations that do something long-term such as China, Russia or even Singapore and using those abstracted empirical cases as support for an eco-authoritarianism.

Our starting assumption should be that ‘autocracies tend towards short-termism, while democracies tend towards long-termism’.¹¹ The challenge then is to give greater support to the tendencies towards the long-term within democracies.

The drivers of short-termism in democracies

Democracies still have a lot of factors that push them towards the short-term, despite their capacity for long-term thinking and action. To address these pressures, it is important to understand the complexity of the dynamics involved. There are a range of factors that could

drive the tendency to discount the future. Expressed in an abstract manner there are at least three ways that people might prioritize the present over the future.¹² Firstly, people are not naturally inclined to defer their gratification and will often want benefits sooner rather than later. Our brains are to a degree hard-wired to seek pleasure and if possible, avoid immediate pain. Both citizens and politicians often operate in this way and reactive practices are reflected in the very framework of democracy. After all ‘democratic government is supposed to be responsive. To the extent that it transfers these psychological tendencies to the political process, it produces laws and policies that reflect this bias toward the present’.¹³ While at the outset of this chapter, we questioned whether all motivation always follows this path there seems little doubt in agreeing it might be a factor in the tendency towards short-termism.

A second driver of short-termism is that people choose the short-term because they are far from certain that benefits will be delivered in the long-term. Alan Jacobs and J. Scott Matthews used an experimental design to test responses among citizens to a range of long-term policy options and found that it is not so much impatience or a desire for immediate benefits that led to doubts about taking those options.¹⁴ It was rather that citizens did not trust government and doubted its ability to deliver in the future, even if its commitment was genuine. Long-termism demands, then, what the political culture in many established democracies appears to conspicuously lack: trust and faith in government to both keep its promises and possess the competence to deal with the complexities of delivery in the context of long-term policymaking. But there are ways in which trust can be built and sustained, as we shall argue later in the chapter. Governments may fail to do so but making a credible commitment to its achievement should be possible.

A final driver of short-termism might be that citizens tend to discount the moral importance of future people because they lack a connection with them. Do I feed my family now or worry about generations to be born in fifty years? Or as Groucho Marx put it rather more sarcastically: “what have future generations ever done for us?”¹⁵ The concept of inter-territorial justice is perhaps easier to justify in the abstract than in the here-and now. But some campaigners are rather good at getting across the idea. In December 2018, Greta Thunberg spoke to the United Nations Climate Change COP24 Conference in Katowice, Poland and argued:

The year 2078 I will celebrate my seventy-fifth birthday. If I have children, then maybe they will spend that day with me. Maybe they will ask about you. Maybe they will ask why you didn't do anything, while there was still time to act. You say you love your children above all else, and yet you are stealing their future in front of their very eyes.¹⁶

The idea of stewardship or being a “good ancestor” is regularly repeated in human history. The absence of a moral connection to the future may drive short-termism but it is a connection that is not always absent.

The causes of short-termism which we have identified so far are mixed which in turn suggests that the solutions are also likely to be mixed. There is not a single change that will deliver greater long-term policymaking but rather several interventions. All the drivers of short-termism are in different ways built into, indeed, integral to democratic systems. If the focus is on immediate gratification that in part reflects that there are intense pressures in democracies to deliver. That is one of its strengths, but it does push the system towards short-termism. If the focus is on trusting about delivery in the long-term there are sound reasons why citizens will be sceptical of both the ability of governments of the future to keep their promises. Scepticism about those who hold power is a classic justification and argument for democracy. Democracy

exists because powerholders cannot be assumed to be trustworthy not because they are trustworthy. Moreover, the moral commitment to the future may find itself challenged by other moral demands present in most democracies to tackle inequalities, create meaningful employment, and work for citizens or invest in their education or health. The solutions that will work are about making sure that pressures for the future find matching institutional expression in the pressures for the present that are a defining feature of democracy. These include, for example, the electoral cycle, where politicians (if they want to get re-elected) must consider how best to re-present themselves to voters.

Democracies require regular and competitive elections which tend to generate demands to deliver sooner rather than later. Special interest groups play a major part in all democracies as they are consulted about policies in their areas of interest. And at times those groups ‘with considerable (or undue) political influence can use their influence to win concessions that distribute long-term costs to others and confer benefits on themselves’.¹⁷ A powerful economic actor through directly funding a party or an election campaign or through indirectly threatening to withdraw their job and wealth creating investment can push politics down the route of short-termism, and so lead to, for example, activities that could accelerate the threat of climate change. Maybe because they have better organised lobby groups and are more willing to turn-out and vote, the priorities of the elderly regular triumph over the needs of younger or unborn generations in democracies.

Finally, there is the complex issue of how democracies can hear from people who do not yet exist. Future generations cannot be present. Young people are often pushed forward as a surrogate voice for the future;¹⁸ others advocate the idea of people or organised groups with a special care for the future, such as committed environmentalists,¹⁹ speaking for future generations. But neither option is entirely convincing or likely to be viewed as always legitimate within democratic practice. After all what is being made is a claim to represent and that claim can be challenged. But legitimate political decisions typically require authorization and/or accountability by those very people whose interests are potentially affected and that fundamental democratic argument provides both a case for engaging citizens of the present and citizens of the future. A confounding issue is the assumption that future citizens will all hold the same views because they all share the same interests. But this is an unwarranted view, as Graham Smith²⁰ has argued, because differences in ‘social and economic power are expressed within and between future generations and any policy choice will have distributional impacts across each generation’ and a result it cannot be assumed ‘that future generations speak with one voice; rather it will involve balancing the variety of interests within and across future (and current) generations. Normative judgements are to be made’. Moreover, there are challenging issues over whether the future can be accurately predicted. A sour law of human prediction is that it is often wrong. A famous study by Philip Tetlock claimed to show that the predictions of experts, especially famous ones, were no better than those made by random chance and although in later work he recognised the emergence of super-forecasters, their success in prediction was usually achieved over a time-frame of less than a year.²¹

A strategy and practice of reform

Reforms that claim to futureproof democracy have come to the fore in the last decade or so. A list is provided by Michael MacKenzie which does its utmost to capture the range and variety of options that are on offer.²² His list provides the basis of the contents of Box 11.1. We support his list of reforms because they range in a broad sense over the input, throughput and output elements of a democratic system that aligns with the organising principle of this book. We are

not quite so positive about all the reforms as he is but do agree that combinations of these reforms could play a major role in shifting the balance in democracies towards long-term policymaking.

The starting point is reforms aimed at making *representative politics* more forward looking. We are maybe a little more sceptical than him about the prospects of success or even the legitimacy of the reforms proposed but we are sympathetic to the general principle of tweaking representative institutions to ensure that they take their responsibilities for the future more seriously. Some of the reforms, implemented in the right circumstances, have shown evidence of achievement.

The second reform driver is about different ways of allowing *citizens to participate* and express their commitment to long-term policy. MacKenzie is not alone in thinking that citizens given the appropriate opportunity can drive forward long-term policymaking. Graham Smith argues that deliberative mini-publics or citizens' assemblies (as they were described in Chapter 4) that are composed of randomly selected citizens who sift through evidence and then reflect to come to a judgement 'outperform more traditional democratic institutions in orientating participants to consider long-term implications, often in areas where preferences are not well formed'.²³

Random selection creates a diverse group of citizens especially if it is selected using quota sampling so that the chosen citizens reflect the social and cognitive diversity of the population and as such are better placed to speak for a range of future interests and concerns. Secondly because these citizens are randomly selected, they are less likely to be captured in their decision making by powerful interests keen to defend their interests in the short run. Deliberation provides additional drivers towards long-termism because citizens in the mini-public can be made aware of intergenerational issues and spend the time to think about what their duty to the future is and what that could mean in terms of decision making. Finally, deliberation promotes slow thinking in its participants that unlike the more intuitive fast thinking that tends to dominate when asked for a quick response to a survey question, for example, it gives space for humans to show, as noted earlier in the chapter, their hard-wired the capacity to think and plan over long timespans. All this works best when positions are not too strongly formed and reflective of an established partisan divide before citizens start to deliberate as if positions are more fixed and antagonistic within the group then it may be that some participants will already be captured by powerful lobbies or unwilling to change their mind or listen to evidence that contradicts their previous positions.

The next set of reforms are about *shifting governance practices*. One that we add to the suggestions from Michael MacKenzie is an argument for devolving power as a potential driver of long-term policymaking within democracies. Here we are siding again with Roman Krznaric who calls for 'a radical devolution of power away from nation-states'.²⁴ His argument is that big corporate interests and other vested are better at capturing national politics and that local politics is more open, sometimes, to a wider range of interests. Of course, it can be recognised as a counter argument that special interests can capture local or regional government and that it is far from immune to corruption. We would argue that devolved government may have a particular role in promoting long-termism for the reason that it is an expression of dispersed but often relatively stable representative politics (because electoral competition is often more limited given the concentration of preferences and interests in different populations). Long-term policies and long-term coalitions of support especially around issues of economic development have been a feature of local politics for some time. Local leaders can use a variety

Box 11.1 Reforms to improve long-term policymaking within democracies

Reform type and form	Key features	Likely impact
Representation		
Youth Quotas	Reserved seats for young citizens to help them speak for future generations	Could be positive but young elected representatives may face pressures to deliver for the short-term and may focus on needs of young rather than future generations
Representatives of the Future	Elected positions for those who can speak for future generations	Selecting who can take on that role in a way seen as legitimate by most voters makes this proposal problematic
Longer Electoral Terms	Avoiding too frequent elections to encourage longer-term policymaking (some suggest terms of 15 years)	Could have positive effects but cannot address all the drivers of short-termism in politics and may well be regarded as too undermining of public accountability by most voters
Second Chamber	Given role in scrutinising legislation to protect future generations	Potentially valuable but if greater powers reside in first chamber short-term considerations may still dominate
Citizen Participation		
Referendums	Public vote on issue set by government that “binds” a way forward for the future	Some referendum defined as “once in a generation opportunity” to set direction but changes in political context always mean that the vote can be revisited
Citizens Initiatives	Public vote on issue framed by citizens’ campaign for similar purpose	Again, can be agenda defining for the future but inevitably subject to being overthrown in the future
Citizens’ Assemblies	Evidence driven and reflective judgement on issue of long-term policy by randomly elected citizens	Can show the capacity of citizens for engaging in long-term policymaking but may lack legitimacy
Governance Procedures		
Devolve power	Letting local and city government take more power and decisions given their tendency to think more long-term	The local level can allow for the building of long-term policies and long-term coalitions of support

Reform type and form	Key features	Likely impact
Sub-Majority Rules	Allows a minority (a third) in an elected assembly to block legislation until the next election	A proposal so open to abuse in conflict driven politics that it makes for a virtual non-starter
Posterity Impact Statements	Requiring legislation to demonstrate future positive influence	A useful challenge in defining policy but may collapse into a ritual tick box exercise
Administrative Procedures		
Ombudsman for Future Generations	Independent body to advocate for the future	A powerful advocate limited by lack of power and legitimacy
Intergenerational Trusts	Offers legally protected public money from being spent in current accounts and reserves them for decisions by future generations	Future generations may still make short-term decisions about how to spend the money reserved
Constitutional and legal		
Balanced Budget Clauses	Stops the practice of spending now and getting other generations to pay later	May be difficult to enforce as spending and taxation decisions move forward but also may be undesirable as long-term borrowing may be appropriate to meet some pressing spending needs in tune with the economic cycle or the demands of crises
General Protections for Future Generations	Clauses put in constitution to insist that needs of future generations are considered in decision making	May depend on how the clauses are interpreted by courts and standing of the courts compared to other political sources of power. May also be difficult to enforce
Environmental Clauses	Clauses to protect the future environment	Will face similar constraints as general protection clauses

of strategies for reaching out to citizens and can appeal to local identity and community as a basis for a “leap of faith” to trust commitments made about future benefits for potentially short-term costs.

One advantage in this respect is that in most mature democracies devolved government tends to be seen by citizens as more trustworthy than central government.²⁵ Roman Krznaric’s research based on the Intergenerational Solidarity Index shows that ‘the more decentralised a government is in its decision-making, the better it performs in terms of long-term public policy’.²⁶

The next set of reforms in Box 11.1 are captured under the heading of *administrative changes*. These provide some of most interesting and powerful examples of reforms. The idea of an

Ombudsman for the Future has become a practice in several polities, including Hungary, Israel and Wales. These are independent bodies tasked with protecting the interests of future citizens using public argument and in some instances powers to delay actions by other government agencies if they fail to account for the future impact of their decision making. They have had a mixed history with the Israeli office being abolished after one parliamentary term and the powers and status of the Hungarian body diminished. But they nevertheless offer an option for pushing democracies closer to including long-term thinking in their decision-making.

The independence of these ombudsman institutions is an asset in that they can be free from immediate political pressures and able to act without worrying too much about what their coalitions or supporters might think of their judgements. But there are difficulties and limits to how they can operate in the context of the wider cut and thrust of democratic politics. These institutions may claim to speak for the future, but that claim can be disputed not least as different interests may exist in the future as much as they do now. They may also lack legitimacy when engaged in a row with elected politicians or popular movements of citizens. Who are they to overrule the will of the people? Finally, they are vulnerable to changes in government and vacillations in political elite opinion particularly at times of broader political change in the aftermath of disruptive global events.

Here Graham Smith comes up with a suggestion that fits with our idea that sometimes the best reforms combine different elements of reform. In this case the independent body seeks to actively bolster its standing by engaging in extensive and deliberative public participation to both guide its decisions and give them greater legitimacy. He concludes that ‘while public participation cannot fully overcome the challenges to legitimacy experienced’ by these institutions for the future, ‘it can potentially ameliorate these vulnerabilities in two related ways. First participation can enable more inclusive judgements about the interests of future generations. Second, participation can enhance the political standing of these institutions’.²⁷

The idea of reserving funds for future generations to spend also provides a potentially powerful mechanism for future proofing democracy. The most prominent example of such an institution is the Government Pension Fund of Norway which comprises two investment funds owned by the government of Norway. The larger fund engages in global investment funded by the surplus revenues of the Norwegian production of oil and gas. It is the world’s largest investment fund with over \$1 trillion (in US dollars) in assets and is worth about \$200,000 US dollars for each Norwegian citizen. The smaller fund is limited to the narrower function of national insurance, underwriting pensions funding through investments in Scandinavian companies and property. As Michael MacKenzie explains, intergenerational trust funds fulfil at least three functions: (1) they save for the future a share of whatever wealth is created within current generations; (2) they therefore prevent funds being used solely for short-term objectives; and (3) they can reserve funds for investments that might match the immediate preferences of citizens but might be their choice in the future. In short, they can address: ‘three potential sources of short-termism: the absence of future generations, the political dynamics of short electoral cycles, and the immediate preferences of voters’.²⁸

The final set of reforms come under the heading of *constitutional and legal clauses*. There are considerable attractions in the idea that it might be possible to build into the political system constraints and rules that favour the future. They could provide the framework for the making of decisions and be designed in such a way as to protect the future against the pressures of the present. As Roman Krznaric argues:

*Law matters not just because it is a way to ring-fence the interests of futureholders and protect them from the short-termism of incumbent politicians, but because it acts as a reference point against which future generations commissioners and citizen assemblies can judge governments and hold them to account.*²⁹

But even though there are number of efforts and ideas on offer to capture the interests of future generations the biggest issue that he notes is the problem of making enforcement real. After all it proves hard enough to enforce the rights of those living so it might prove more difficult still to enforce the right of future generations. There are difficulties of trying to change the world through words in legal and constitutional statements as they can be interpreted in different ways and pushed in different directions or even ignored by powerful interests.

Conclusion – moving beyond the veil of ignorance

There is no compelling argument or evidence to support the idea that democracies cannot be future-proofed. The idea that is often mooted that only more autocratic government can plan and act in the interests of the future is not supported by the evidence. Equally there is no easy way to ensure that the balance of pressures in democracies is more tilted towards the future and away from the present. Yet in this chapter we have outlined a wide range of reform strategies and argue that a mix of them could make a difference.

Democracy is a messy practice, but it can be made a better practice. Future proofing democracy is an exercise in politics as much as morals. The response of citizens remains central to any politics of the long-term. Citizens can, quite reasonably, have no strong views on some issues and are therefore willing to concede decision-making authority to others, as long as decisions appear to be being made in the public interest or more particularly are not being usurped by self-interested politicians or organised interests. The hurdle, therefore, that advocates of the long-term have to get over is not to win every argument or get all citizens to agree, it is to increase the capacity of democracy to protect the future by getting enough citizens to go along with supporting long-term commitments, even when there may be some short-term pain.

In our better democracy many citizens will not spend large amounts of effort in reasoning about the short or long-term consequences of policy and instead rely on cues or heuristics to judge their support or otherwise to what is going on. Some citizens may be particularly likely to mobilise against changes in policy that are likely to impose losses on them in the short run but mobilisation is often only a reluctant choice.

Under these conditions it is easy to imagine that there is a myriad of opportunities for political leaders, campaigners and political movements to approach citizens to gain their agreement or acquiescence, at least, to long-term policies demanding short-term sacrifices. Studies³⁰ suggest that there are many strategies open to advocates of change, for managing pain and making the case for long-term delivery rather than short-term satisfaction. Adapting work on how governments go about avoiding blame and inflicting loss suggests that three broad categories of persuasion might work.

- *First procedures can be changed to lower the visibility of the policy playing on the inattentiveness of citizens.*

- The next option is *influencing perceptions*. Obfuscation of the damaging implications of long-term policy changes is an option and, for example, is quite common in taxation policy.
- The final option open to political leaders seeking to justify short-term losses for long-term gains involves *manipulating pay-offs* – a longstanding tradition in policy analysis.³¹

One option here is to try to share the pain as widely as possible. Another is to concentrate it on citizens who for some reason will struggle to fight back. Another option is to give compensation to those who might be particularly prone to protest or exempt them from some of the worst effects of the long-term policy.

It is important to recognise, of course, that just as proponents of long-term policies can use some of the strategies identified so too can opponents; using variations of the tactics to undermine long-term policy options. They can work hard to increase the visibility of the policy. They can take on proponents for change in the battle of perceptions. They can extend the scope and range of citizens that notice they are adversely affected by the policy. Above all, they can expose the manipulations by supporters of long-term policy for what they are. Nonetheless, long-term policy can take its chances in the contest of ideas, power and politics.

But this chapter also offers reforms that increase the chances that the political battle goes in favour of recognising the legitimate concerns of future citizens. A world where there are consistent advocates for the future in elected assemblies, where citizens are regularly tasked with deliberating and judging on the best long term options, where devolved government seeks consensus about the right strategies for its area for decades to come, where independent bodies speak up strongly and public backing is provided for future interests and where legal and constitutional protections for our role as “good ancestors” are present. These reforms would enhance the prospects for long-term policymaking considerably. Future proofing democracy to tip democratic politics towards taking inter-generational justice and climate change more seriously is an achievable and realistic goal.

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