

First Deliberative Poll in Argentina – La Plata, Buenos Aires

The Public Deliberates About Transit and Traffic Issues in La Plata

A randomly selected sample of the entire city of La Plata gathered at a local school for a one-day deliberation about the transit and traffic issues facing the people of La Plata. In conducting this Deliberative Poll, close to 1,500 randomly selected people were surveyed and on October 31st, 62 participants joined policy experts and the Mayor for a full-day of deliberations.

The Sample

62 “participants” who deliberated for one-day

1414 “non-participants” who took the same survey but did not deliberate

There were no differences between participants and non-participants with respect to gender, employment status, and marital status. The sample was broadly representative of the city, but there were somewhat fewer participants from southern areas of the city and from the city center. Participants earned slightly less money, were less educated, older and were more interested in Argentinean politics than non-participants. Although participants were more interested in politics, there were no significant differences between the amount of time participants and non-participants used to engage in the news online, on the television, on the radio or through the newspaper. In comparing attitudinal differences, the results demonstrated that participants and non-participants were very similar. Out of 55 attitude questions, there were significant differences in 10 questions. Even when there were differences that were statistically significant, many of those differences were small in magnitude.

The Public’s Informed Opinions

91.8 percent of participants indicated the reduction of traffic congestion to be an important issue. In reducing traffic congestion, 90.2 percent felt it was important to protect the environment at the same time. 93.3 percent expressed the importance of offering recharge bus cards and 93.2 percent would like to create bus lines that can connect more districts in La Plata.

Bus Lines and Fares Participants’ support for restoring bus lines decreased after deliberations, however, the results demonstrated strong majorities to *restore the following bus lines*:

Line 518 – 76.4%

Line 506 – 72.5%

Line 520 – 79.6%

Line 561 – 76.0%

Line 508 – 78.2%

In addition, 71.7 percent of participants were opposed to increasing bus fare during non-peak hours and 66.7 percent were opposed to increasing bus fare during peak hours.

Bike Lanes 66.7 percent felt the creation of bike lanes is important to consider for reducing traffic congestion, but 61 percent indicated that bike lanes would *increase* traffic congestion. And, 83.6 percent felt the creation of parking lots for bicycles to be important as well. Support for placing bike lanes on 73 diagonal, 74 diagonal, 77 diagonal and 79 diagonal was about 60 percent.

Traffic Violations 68.9 percent of participants favor using photos to catch people who park illegally and 67.8 percent favored using photos to catch speeders. Both of these attitudes were higher prior to deliberations. However, participants do recognize the importance of safe driving, as 80.6 percent favored increasing the number of signs warning drivers to reduce speed and 98.3 percent favored making pedestrian crossing signs.

Metered Parking While just over half of the participants opposed the expansion of metered parking to Los Hornos and San Carlos, about half of participants supported increasing the cost of metered parking in busier streets. And, 52.6 percent felt that metered parking would divert traffic congestion to other neighborhoods.

After deliberations, close to 90 percent of participants felt that “People with views very different from mine often have very good reasons for their opinions”.

Significant Opinion Changes

The deliberations produced a number of large, statistically significant changes of opinion. Before deliberation 71% of the participants agreed strongly that “creating bike lanes would increase traffic accidents.” After deliberation this position dropped twenty points to 50%. Similarly before deliberation, 74% agreed strongly that “creating bus lanes would increase traffic accidents.” After deliberation this position dropped nearly thirty points to only 45%. Before deliberation 54% opposed increasing the cost of metered parking during peak hours. After deliberation this position dropped fifteen points to only 39%.

Throughout the deliberations, the participants grappled with the conflict between the importance of protecting the environment and their wish to protect the freedom to drive cars. Before deliberation 72% thought protecting the environment was more important than protecting the freedom to drive cars. After deliberation this view dropped thirty points to 38% (with 28% thinking that the two values were equally important and 33% preferring the freedom to drive cars.)

Before deliberation, 80% supported building a bus transfer center. After deliberation this position dropped significantly by 19 points to 61%. Before deliberation, 55% supported the new bus terminal. After deliberation this dropped to 45% with 45% opposing. However, this change was not statistically significant.

The participants also dramatically changed their view about whether public officials would listen to their views. Before deliberation 60% disagreed strongly with the statement that “public officials care a lot about what people like me think.” After deliberation this position dropped forty points to only 20%.

Knowledge Gains

The sample became more knowledgeable –correct answers on an index of 5 questions increased from 19.4 to 26.1 percent.

Attitudes toward the Government

After deliberations, trust in Mayor Bruera and his government “to do the right thing” increased significantly to 68.9 percent and satisfaction with Mayor Bruera and his government also increased significantly to 78.0 percent.

Event Evaluation

Over 80 percent of participants felt the overall process, small group discussions, and large group discussions were valuable.