

**The first National Deliberative poll in East Europe
"Fighting Crime in Bulgaria",
organized by Centre for Liberal Strategies,
Alpha Research and BTV,
took place on 12th and 13th of October 2002
at the National Palace of Culture.**

In October 2002, Bulgaria was the sight of the first national Deliberative Poll in Eastern Europe. A national random sample of the citizenry were brought to a single site to deliberate for a weekend on a crucial national issue-how to deal with crime?

The Centre for Liberal Strategies, together with partner organizations - Alpha Research and bTV Television Channel conducted a National Deliberative Poll on the issue of crime in Bulgaria. Its specific focus was ways to deal with and reduce crime.

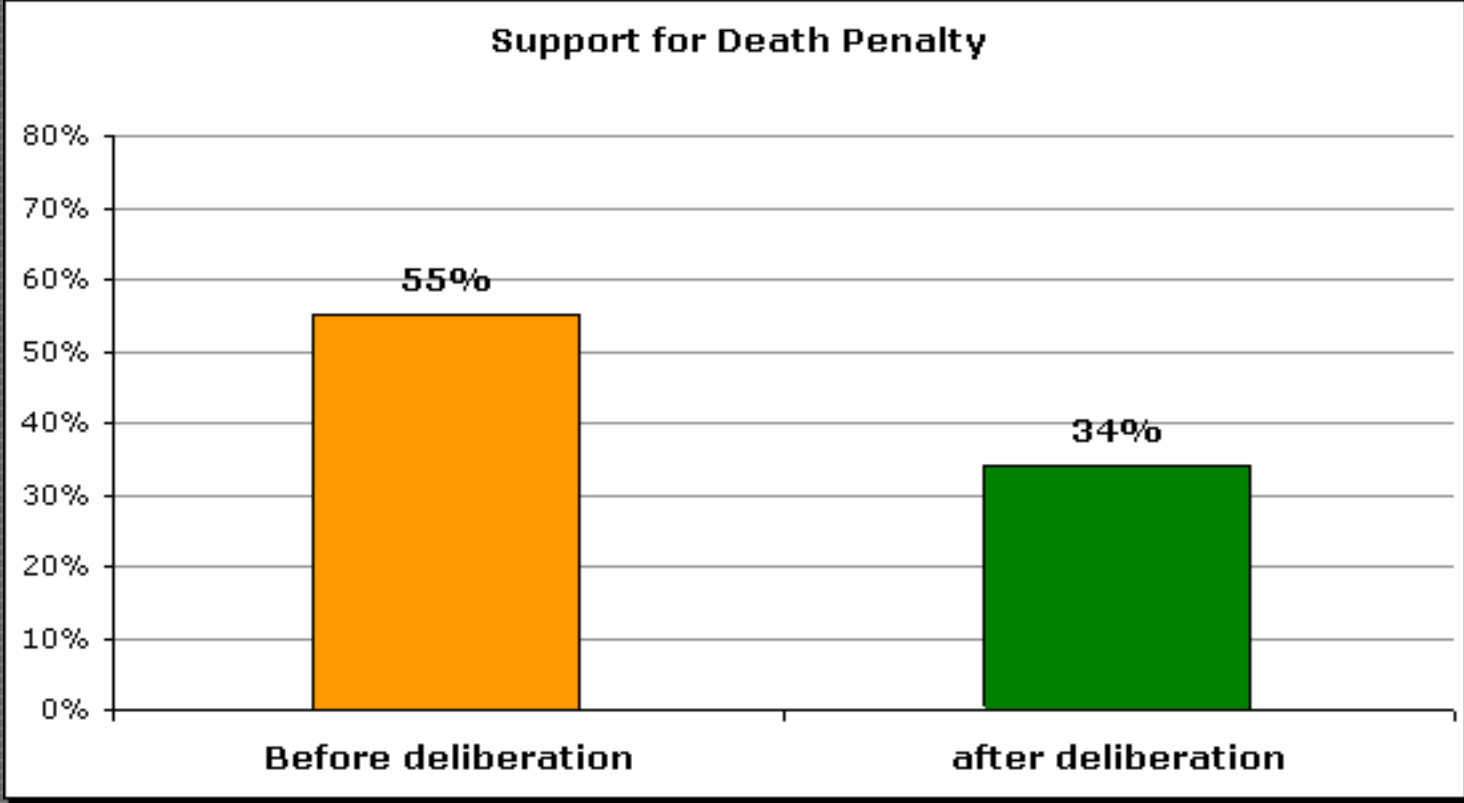
Despite the fact that Bulgaria has stable democratic institutions and regular, well-organized elections, there is growing concern about the widening gap between the public and the elite. The topic of crime has ranked high on the public agenda for years, and a Deliberative Poll increased the chances for an open public dialogue on the issue. It illustrated how informed citizens make choices on the basis of better argumentation and clearly stated positions. The Deliberative Poll - with its weekend microcosm gave a unique opportunity for interaction between a better informed public and officials. It was a unique opportunity to show that democracy is a regime in which people not only take part in free and fair elections, but can also influence policies. A significant number of experts holding key positions in the legislature, the executive, and the judiciary was committed to participate in the panels of the National Deliberative Poll "Fighting Crime in Bulgaria." The first panel "Crime and Punishment" touched on key issues like arrest without bail, the death penalty, "bending the rules" by the police during investigation, and the need for institutional changes. The second panel "Crime and Society" was focused on the economic factors, drugs, and the role of the media. The last panel allowed a direct dialogue with key politicians. The poll also drew the attention of the local and international media and observers as it was the first event of this kind in the region.

The concept of the Deliberative Poll was first developed by Professor James Fishkin of the University of Texas at Austin in 1988. Since that time, he and his key collaborator, Professor Robert Luskin, also of the University of Texas at Austin, have collaborated on 20 Deliberative Polls in various countries around the world. Deliberative Polling is an attempt to use television and public opinion research in a new and constructive way. A random, representative sample is first polled on the issues. After this baseline poll, members of the sample are invited to gather at a single place to discuss the issues. They receive carefully balanced briefing materials, which are also made publicly available. The participants engage in dialogue with competing experts and political leaders based on questions they develop in small group discussions with trained moderators. Parts of the weekend events are broadcast on television, either live or in taped and edited form. After the weekend deliberations, the sample is asked the same questions again. The post-deliberation opinions represent the conclusions the public would reach if people became more informed and more engaged by the issues.

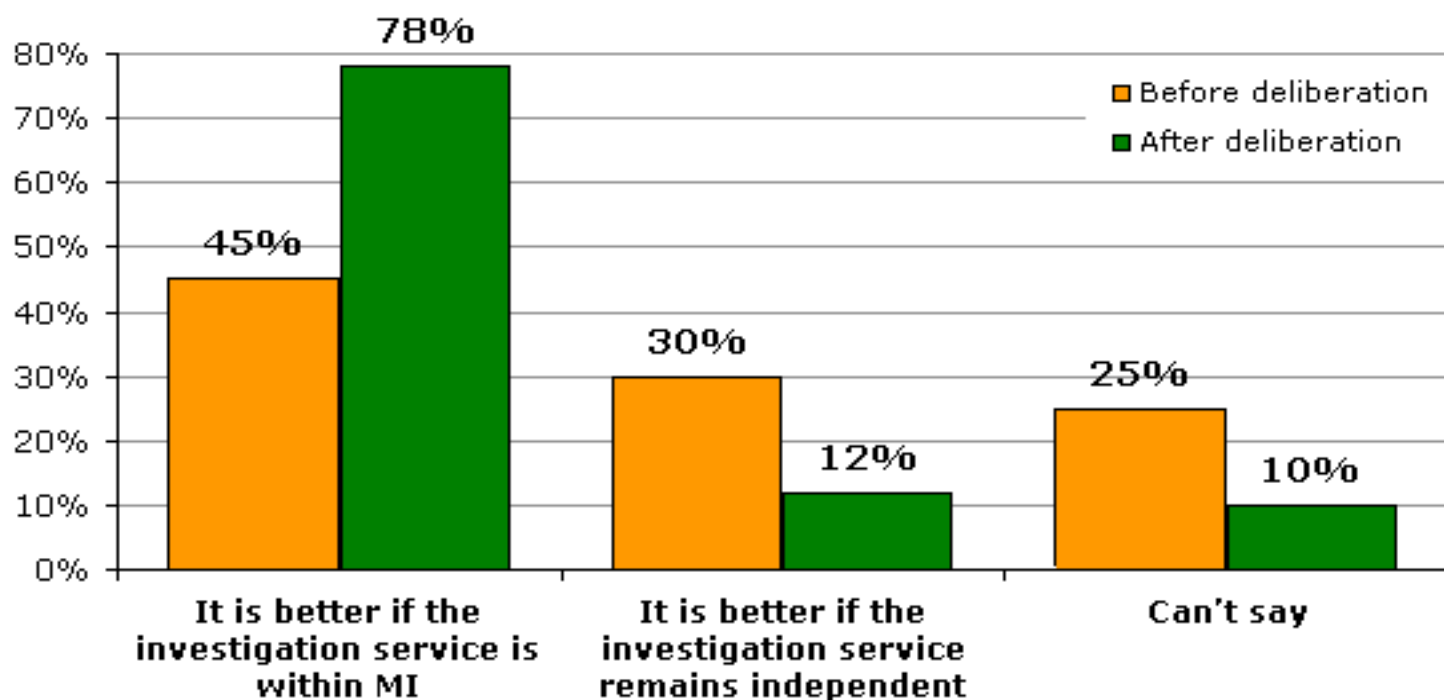
A Brief Description of the National Deliberative Poll Results

There were a number of dramatic, statistically significant changes of opinion most notably on capital punishment, the independence of the prosecutor's office, and the investigation services. The sample changed its views about these issues and notably, the representatives of all four major parties pledged themselves publicly at the concluding session to work to change the constitution to make both the prosecutor's office and the investigation service more accountable. It is worth noting that the current state of the Prosecutor's office was an issue that the public knew little about. Before deliberation, only 17% knew that it was false that "the Chief Prosecutor is responsible to and accountable to Parliament." After deliberation, that rose to 50%, an increase of 33 points.

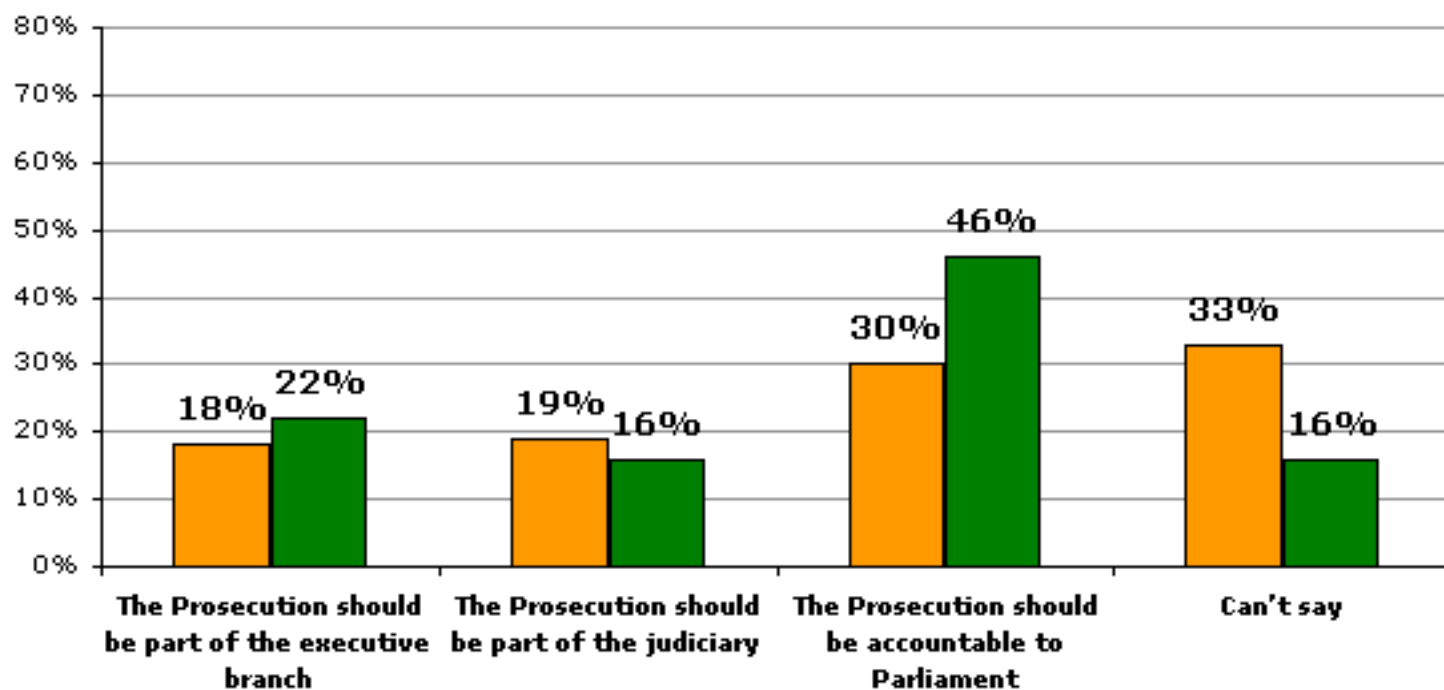
The participants also strongly endorsed the process, which shows the importance of the deliberative poll as a democratic civic practice. The evaluation of the deliberation process also illustrates the unique potential of this format to generate and sustain tolerance among people with a different background, social status, and ethnic origin.



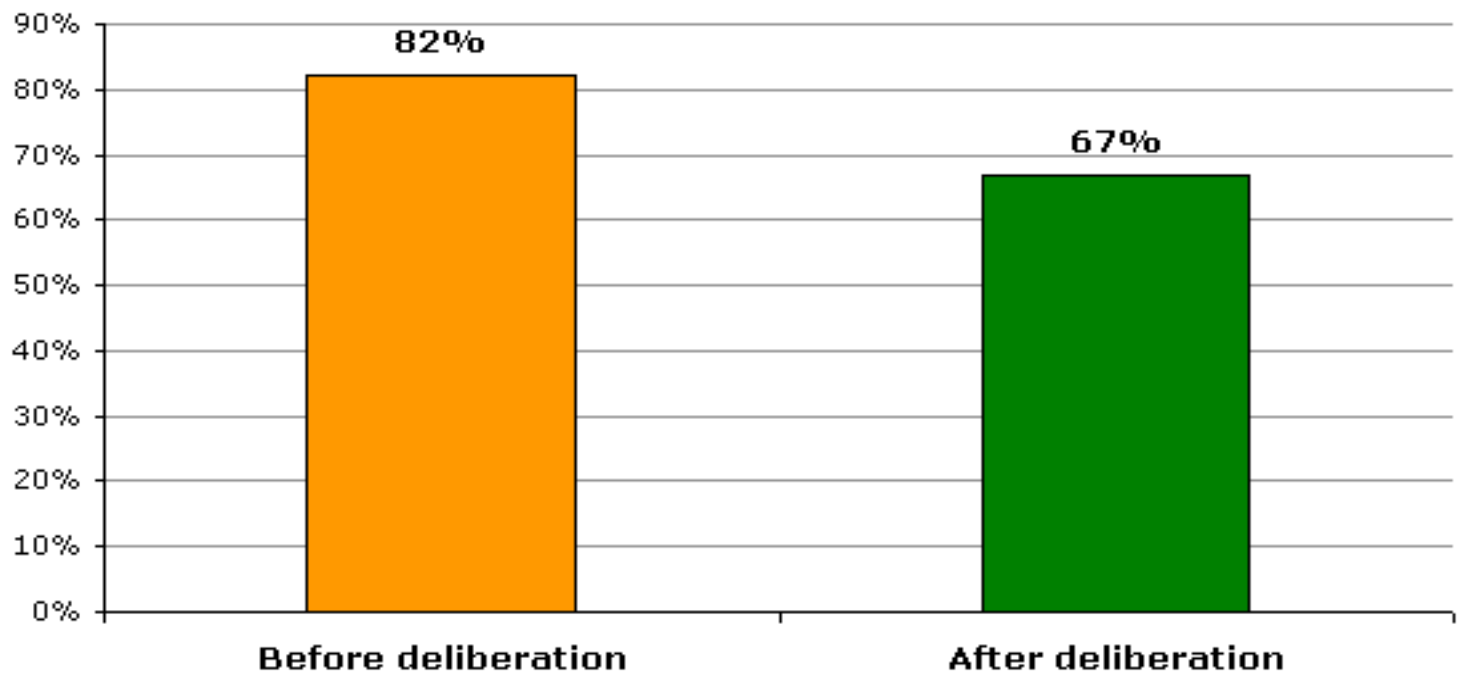
The place of investigation service



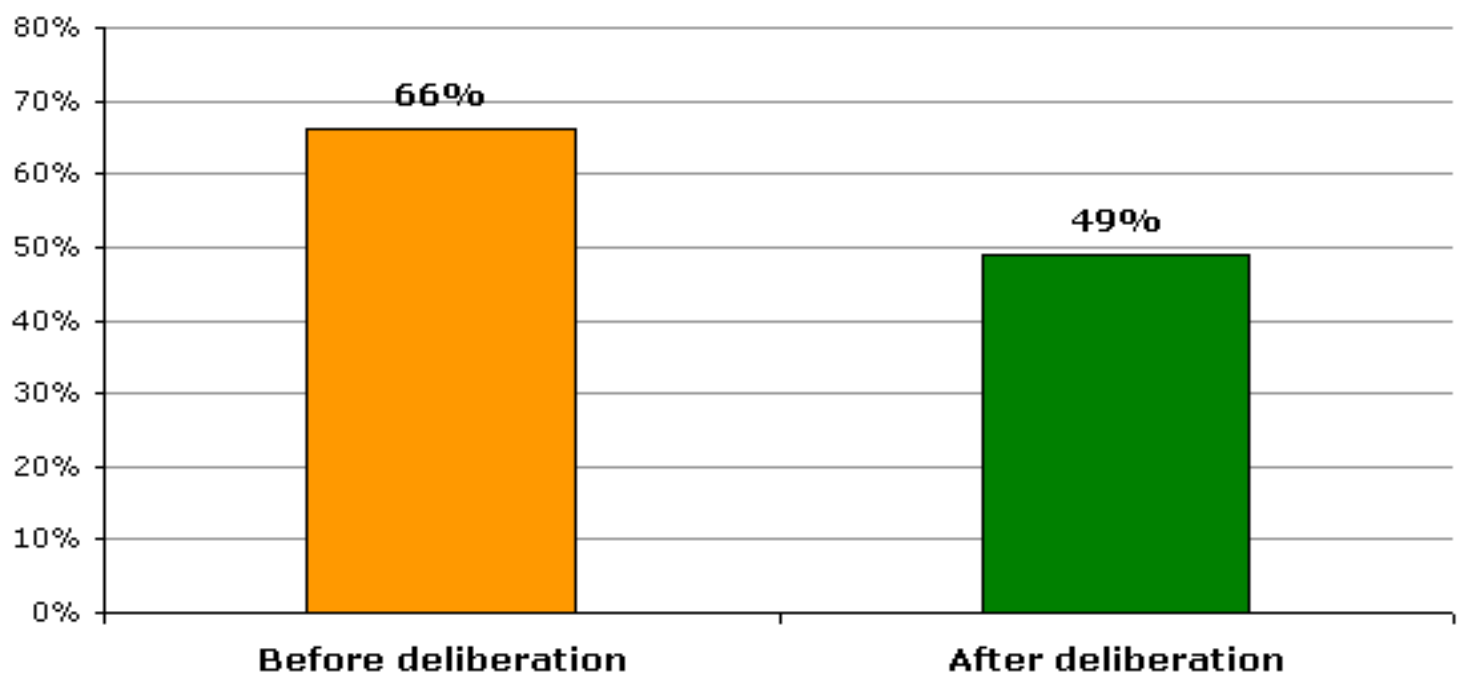
The place of Prosecution



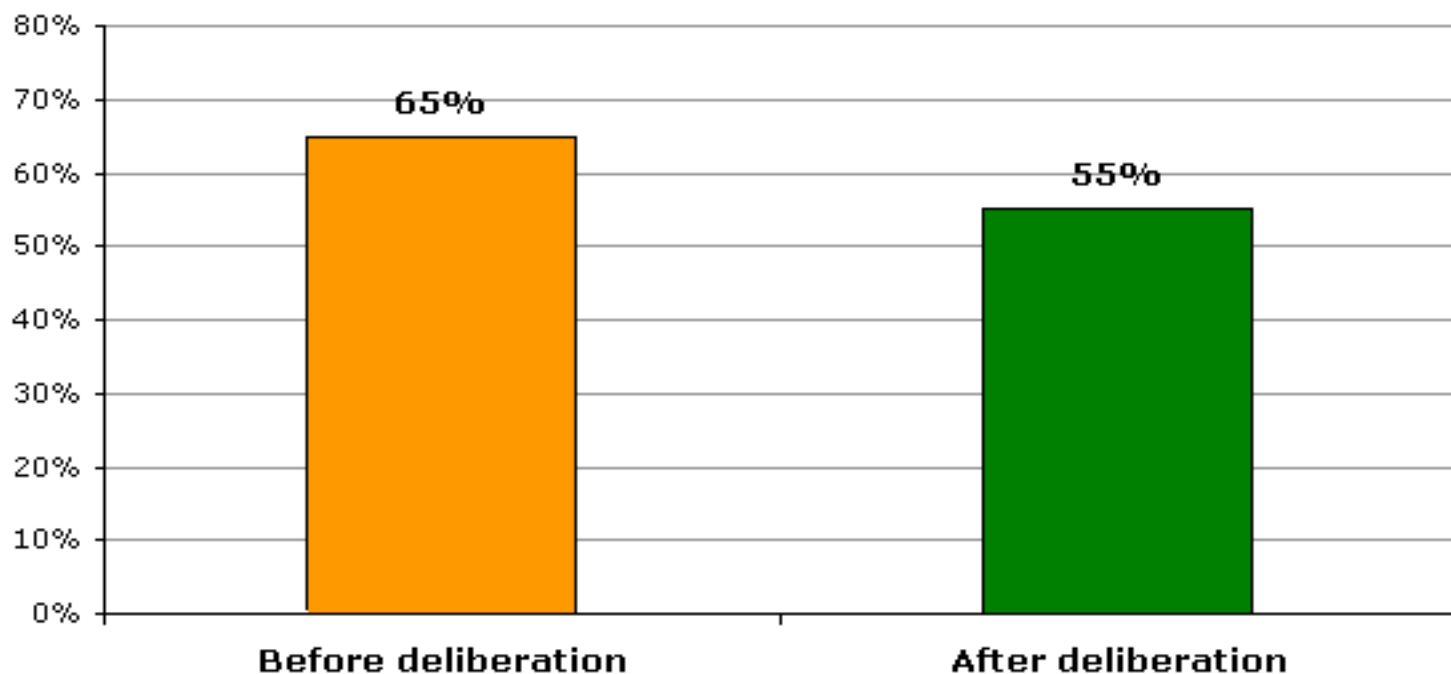
Support for introducing tougher custody measures for defendants



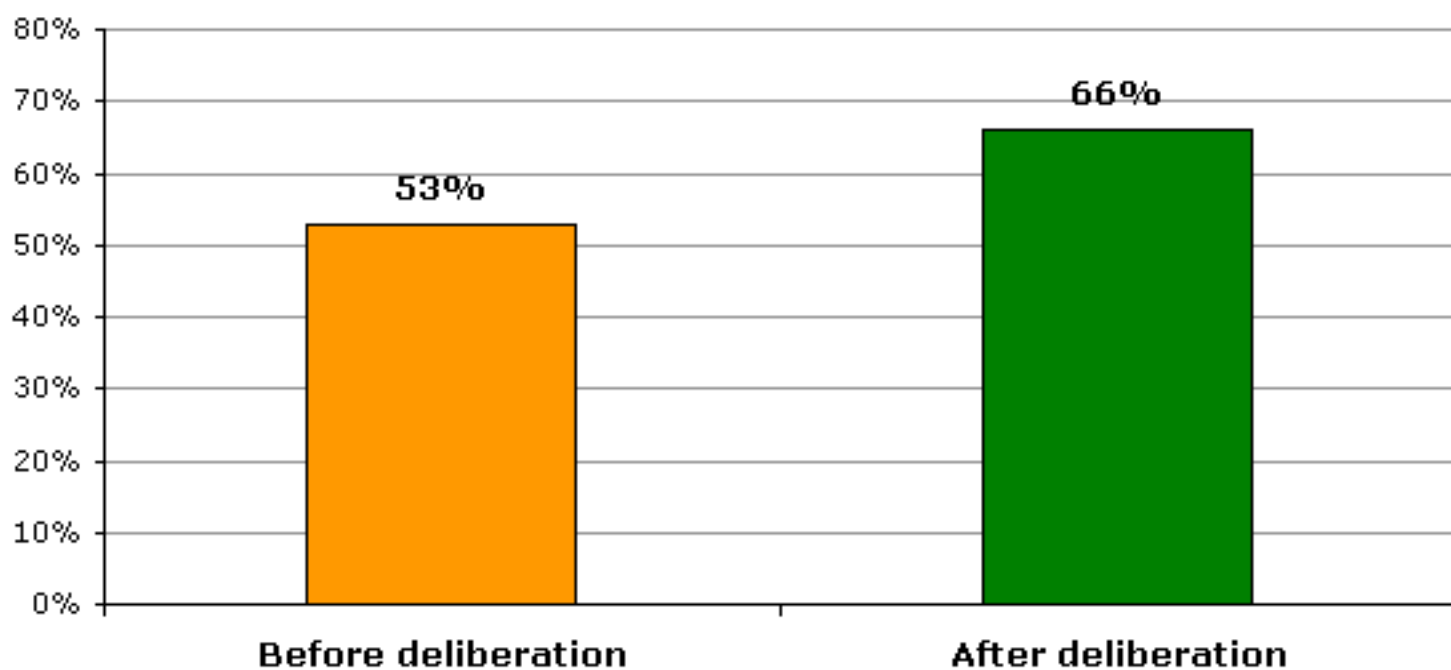
Support for tougher sentences for juvenile offenders



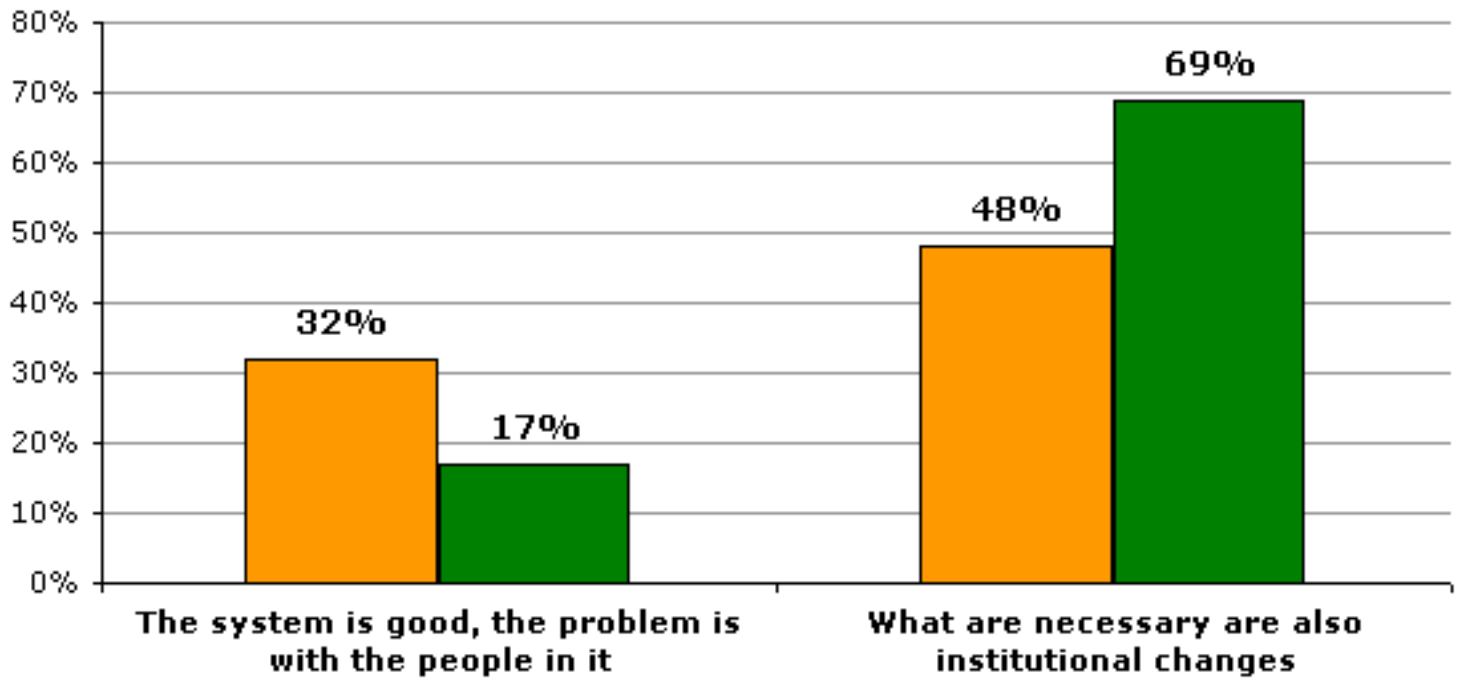
Support for speedier trials without following the procedures



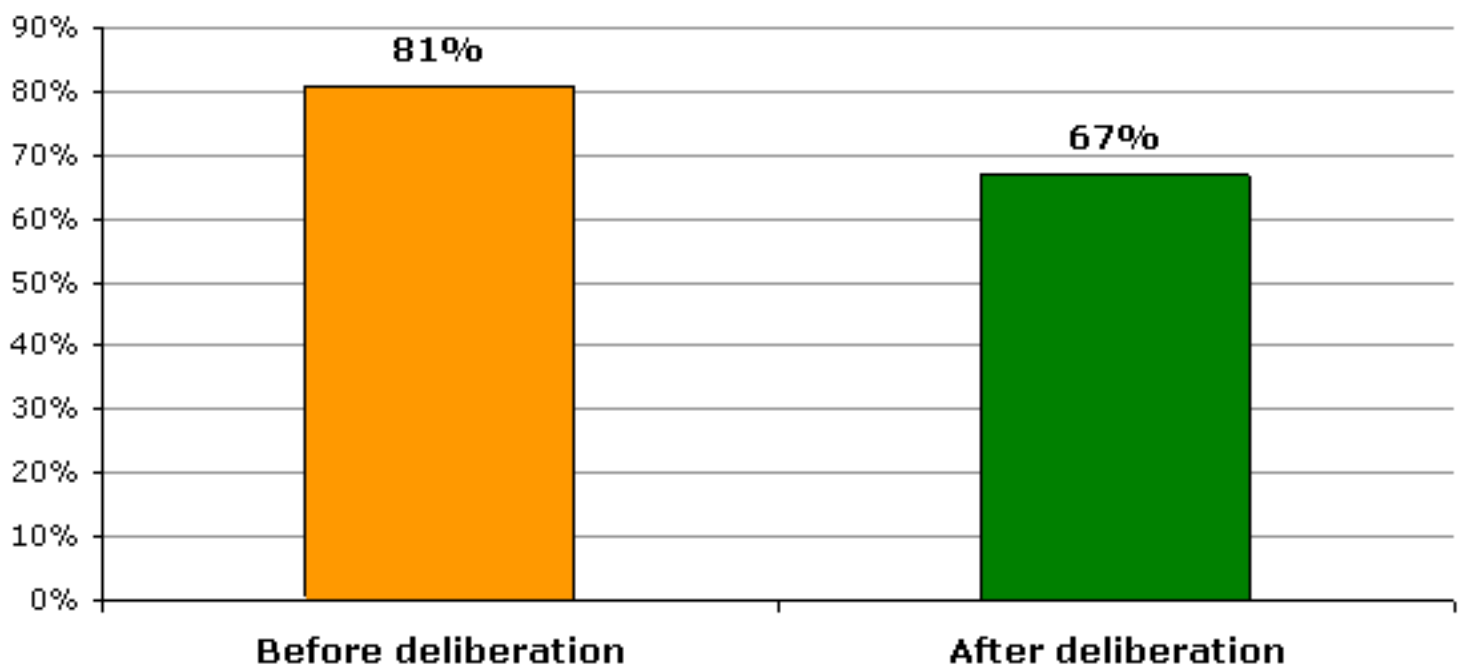
A confession is not enough to find a defendant guilty



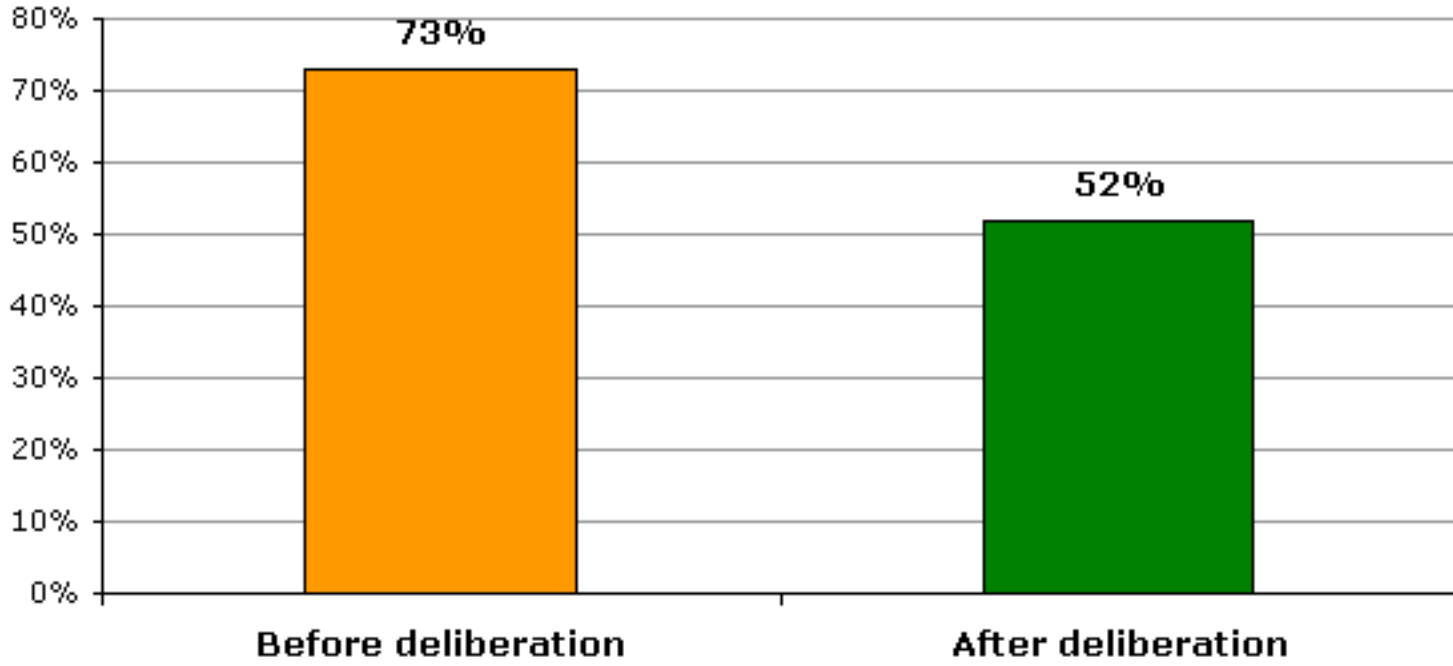
Different options on the problems with the law enforcement system in Bulgaria.



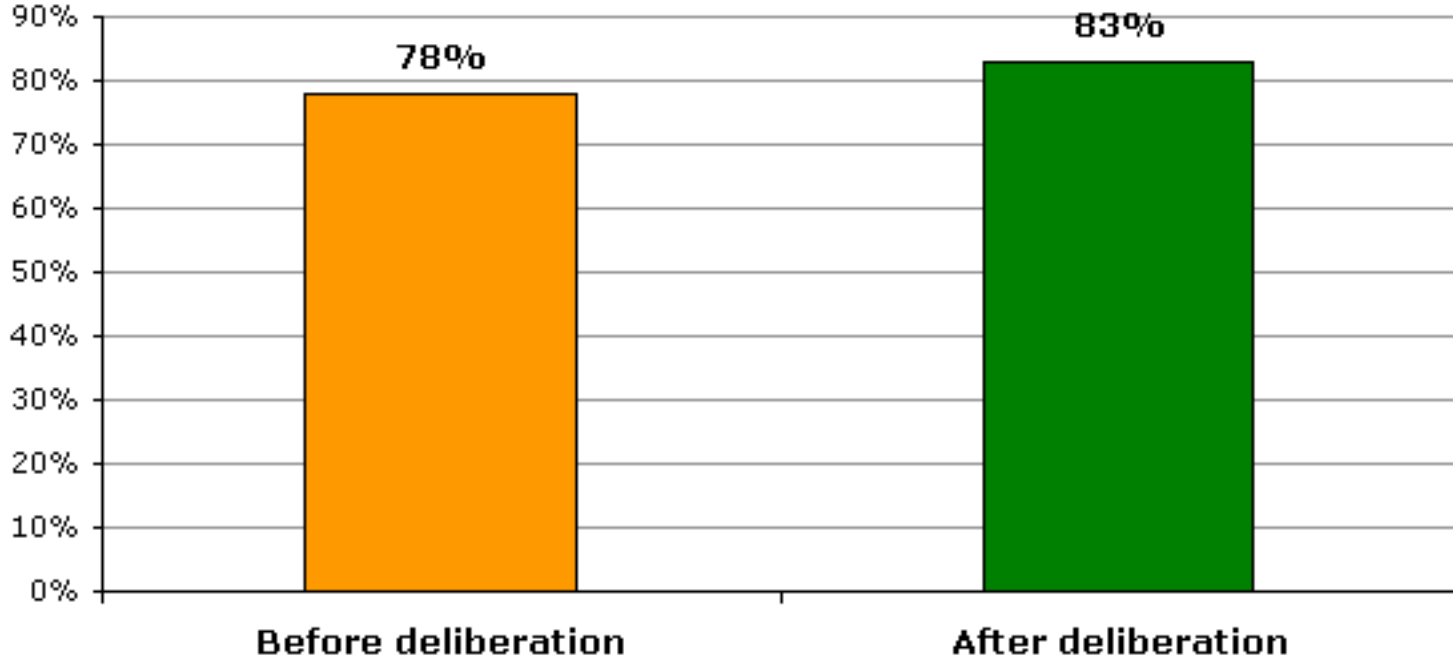
The courts release a great number of offenders without sufficient argumentation.



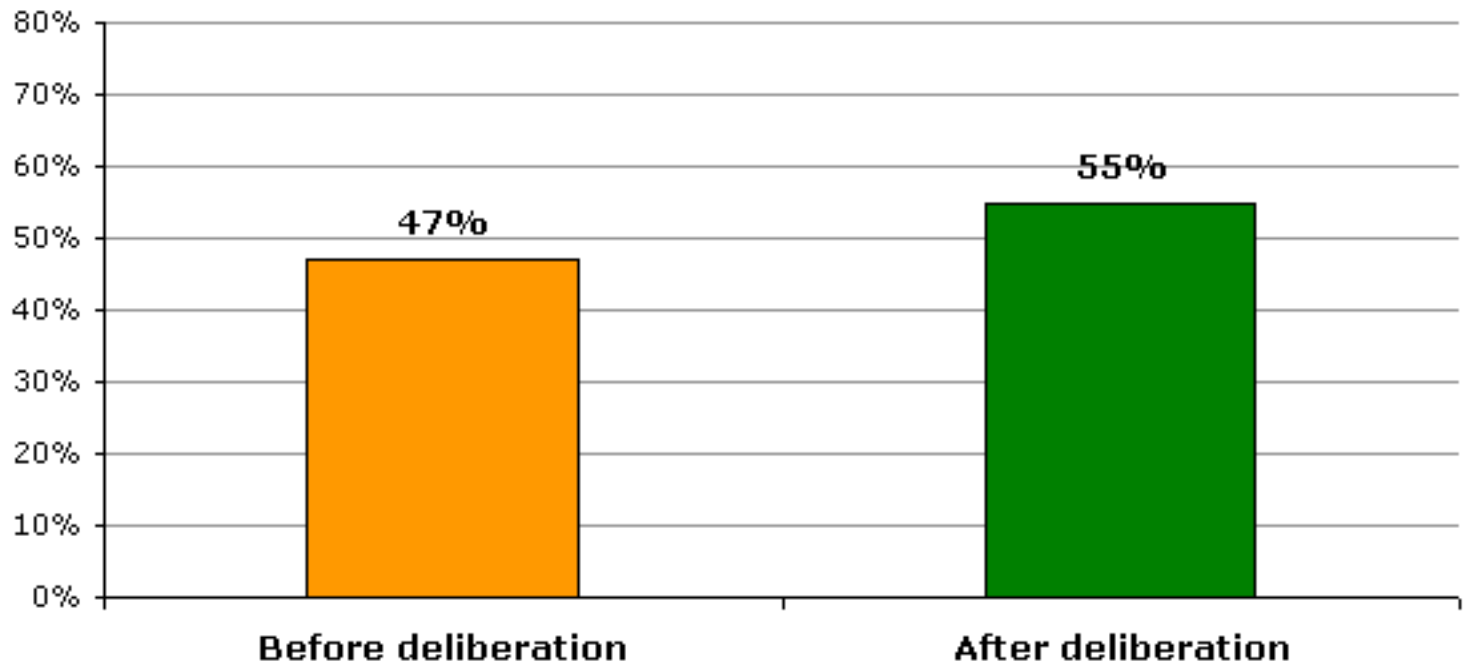
The politicians do not care about what people like me think



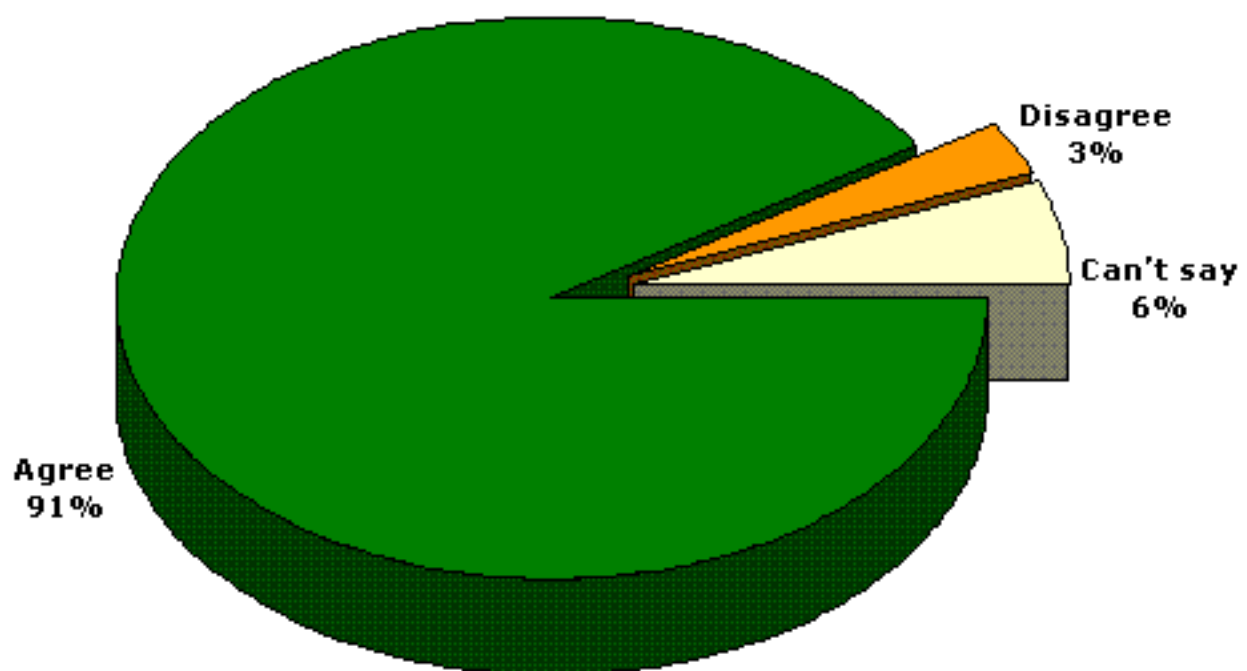
I would share my views on some policy issues as long as there is someone to listen



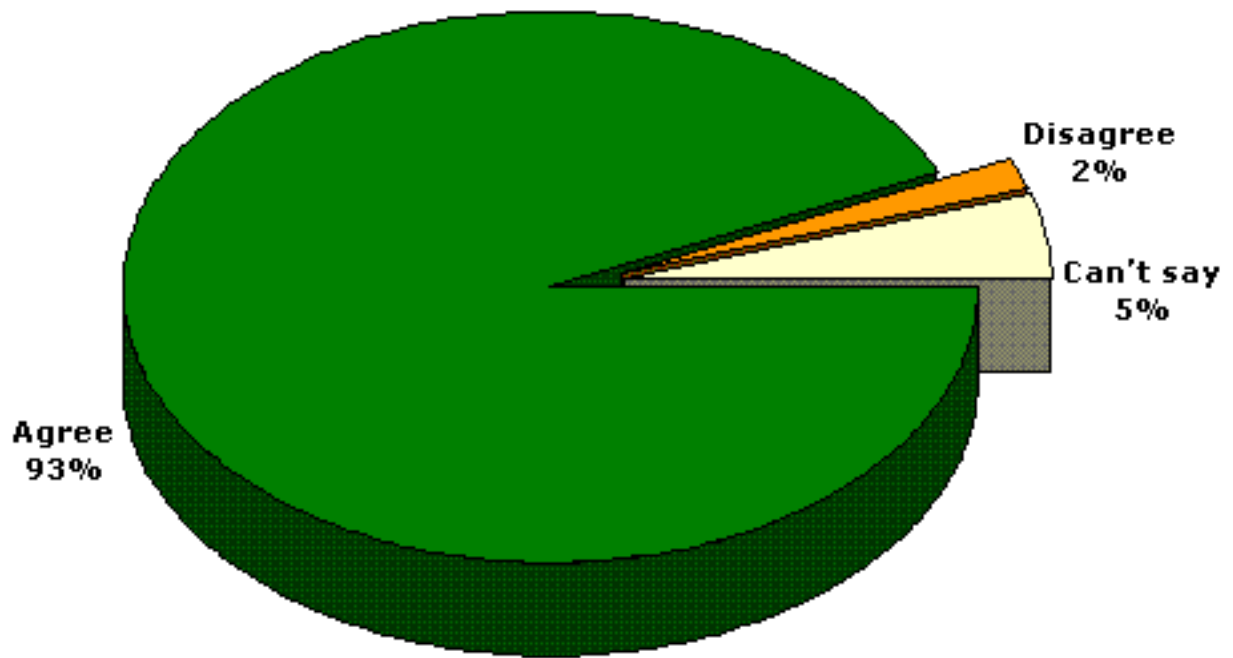
If more people like me express their opinion, the politicians would listen



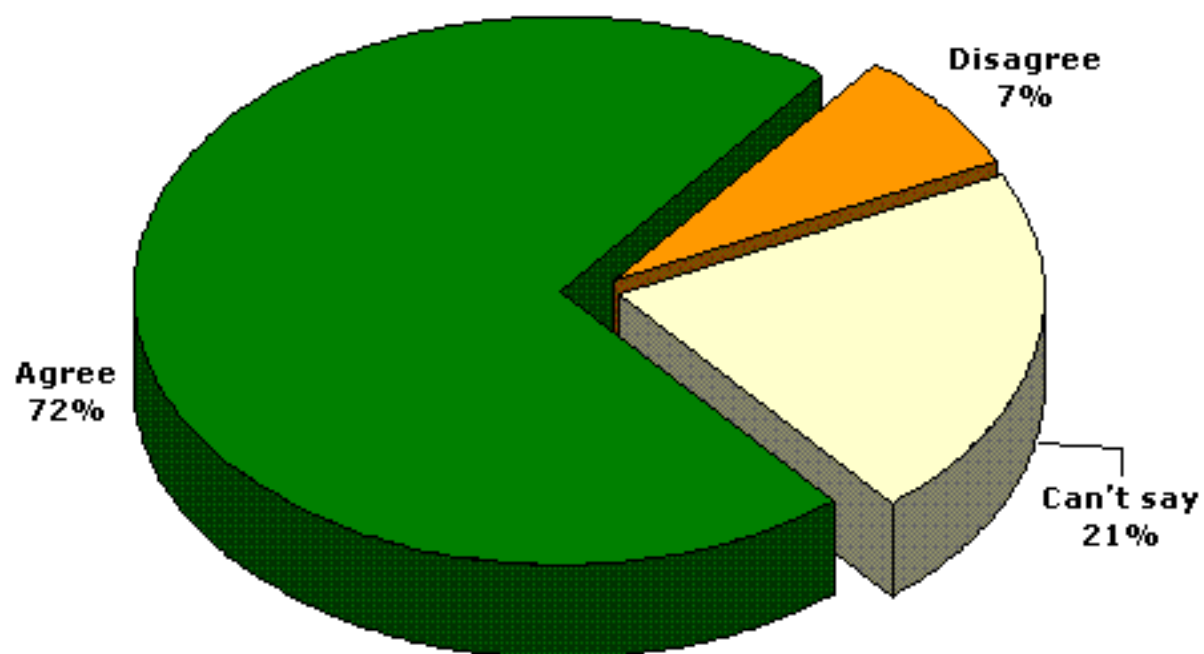
On the discussion all opposing arguments were considered



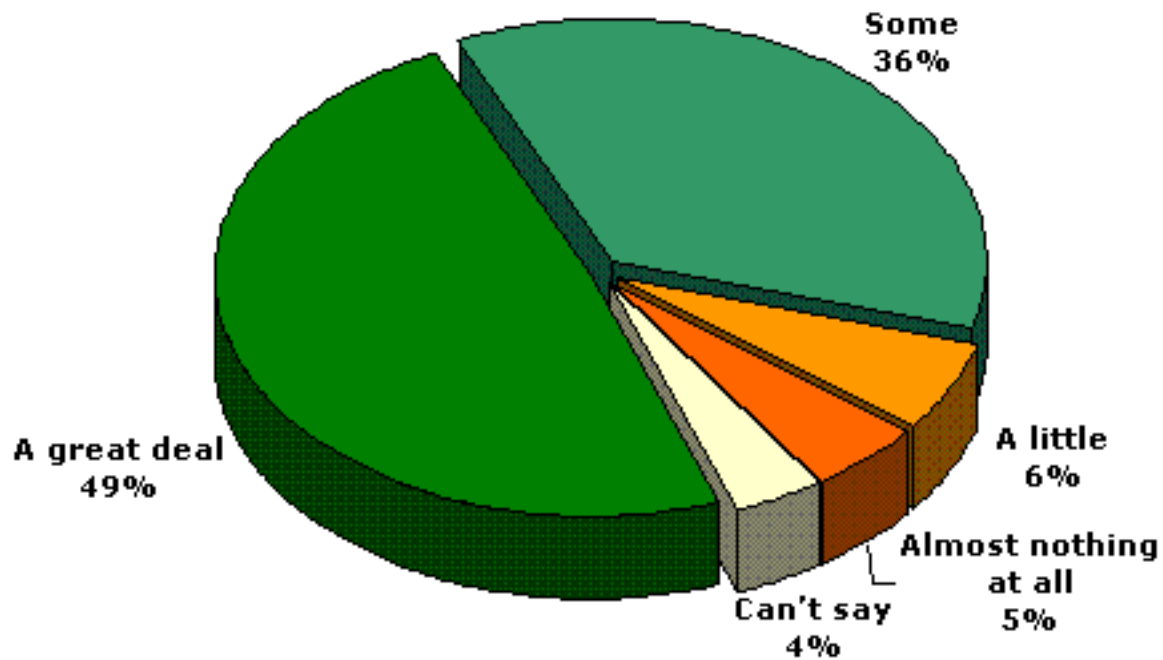
In the last two days I learned a lot about people very different from me – about them, their lives are like, and their positions



In last two days I discovered that the people with views very different from mine often had very good reason for their views



How much did you learn about different positions towards discussed measures for combating crime?



What aspect from The National Deliberative Poll Fighting Crime in Bulgaria helped you clarify your positions on the measures to fighting crime?

