

Experimenting with a Democratic Ideal:  
Deliberative Polling and Public Opinion\*

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\*Prepared for presentation at the Swiss Chair's Conference on Deliberation, the European  
University Institute, Florence, Italy, May 21-22, 2004.

Democratic reform has long striven to realize the apparently contrary values of *political equality* and *deliberation*. The American system initially emphasized deliberation, then progressively added institutions serving political equality.<sup>1</sup> Primaries, recall elections, and the direct election of U.S. Senators have given the public more voice in choosing its representatives. Initiatives and referenda have given it more ability to make policy directly. Public opinion polling has had a similar if more advisory effect.

But this march toward political equality has had the unintended consequence of diminishing deliberation (see Fishkin, 1991). As innumerable surveys have shown, most ordinary citizens know and think remarkably little about politics (Luskin 1987, Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996, Kinder 1998, Price 1999). Thus decisions by referendum involve far less deliberation than decisions by legislatures, and even decisions by legislatures may involve less deliberation than they used to, before legislators had primaries, direct election campaigns (in the case of the U.S. Senate), and poll results to worry about.

This tension between political equality and deliberation is hardly unique to the U.S. While the details differ from country to country, the democratic world has seen a general trend toward ever more direct democracy. The franchise has expanded, referenda have proliferated, and even the mass primary for candidate selection, indigenous to the U.S., has been spreading. But the same rip tide is everywhere evident. Giving the mass public, which is not very deliberative, more say has meant decreasing the level of deliberation behind political decision-making. As political equality has gone up, deliberation has gone down.

### **Deliberation and Political Equality**

But let us say a little about what we mean by “political equality” and, especially, “deliberation.” By *political equality* we mean the equal consideration of everyone's preferences,

where "everyone" refers to some relevant population or *demos*. By "equal consideration," we mean a process of equal counting so that everyone in the *demos* has the same voting power: an equal chance of being the decisive voter, when the voters are described anonymously, without reference to past voting patterns or current preferences. It is worth noting in the present connection that everyone can still have the same chance of being the decisive voter if the voters are a subset of the population selected by lot. This is "formal political equality" (Fishkin 1991); we leave the conditions for preference formation to the discussion of deliberation.

The root of *deliberation* is "weighing." The weighing could be collective, individual, or both, involving discussion, rumination, or both. For present purposes, we take deliberation to be a weighing of competing considerations through discussion that is:<sup>2</sup>

*Informed* (and thus informative). The factual claims in arguments should be reasonably accurate

*Balanced*. Arguments for given propositions by their proponents should be answered by arguments by others with other points of view.

*Conscientious*. The participants should be willing to talk and listen, with civility and respect.

*Substantive*. Arguments should be considered sincerely on their merits, not how they are made or who is making them.

*Comprehensive*. All points of view held by significant portions of the population should receive attention.<sup>3</sup>

While excluding much everyday conversation, these criteria are still *relatively* undemanding. They do not require any particular style or quality of thought, much less the acceptance of any given premises. They are strictly procedural. They stop far short, for

example, of notions of deliberation requiring that participants reason on the basis of philosophical principles that everyone can be expected to accept (as in Guttmann and Thompson 2002, Cohen 1997).<sup>4</sup>

This definition is more demanding than most ordinary conversation, yet can actually be realized, in some degree, even in the real world, and in much greater degree for an experimental microcosm. That degree of attainability allows us to move from thought experiments to real experiments—to observe the effects of increasing deliberation. Instead of controversial stipulations required to complete a thought experiment, the participants in an actual experiment can complete the argument themselves—not behind a hypothetical veil of ignorance but in the actual world of politics and policy.<sup>5</sup>

### **Deliberation *versus* Political Equality?**

In ways, we may have painted the deliberation-equality tradeoff too starkly. For one thing, much of the discussion among political elites is posturing or negotiation rather than deliberation. Minds may change on concrete legislative proposals, but often because negotiation has altered the details or the context (as in logrolling) to make them acceptable or unacceptable, rather than because minds have changed on more fundamental values or empirical premises. Legislators are representatives, after all, and elected to support or oppose certain things (and because they already do so). They are also constrained by their parties. So even elite-level politics is not necessarily that deliberative.

*Theoretically*, indeed, it may even be the mass public that has the greater possibility of real deliberation. Citizens are not bound by constituencies or parties and—in electorates of any size—are not casting votes worth surveilling or bargaining over. They have no need to posture

or negotiate. Hence they are freer to alter their views, and not just on the merits of concrete legislative proposals but also on more fundamental questions of what is and what should be.

As matters stand—and are likely to stand—however, this is only a possibility. For most people, most of the time, politics is merely “a side show in the great circus of life” (Dahl 1961). Most people think and know little about politics. They discuss it, moreover, mainly with others very like themselves and sharing similar views. And that is unlikely to change very much. Not for the public as a whole, at least.

### **Conventional Polling**

In the beginning, public opinion polling combined *aspirations* for both political equality (via scientific sampling) and deliberation. The pioneer was George Gallup, whose sampling was nonrandom—by quota—and thus substandard by modern lights but still a marked improvement on the self-selected samples of previous polls, most memorably including the *Literary Digest*'s. After correctly forecasting Franklin Delano Roosevelt's landslide victory in the 1936 U.S. presidential election, while the *Literary Digest* poll was showing Roosevelt's opponent, Alf Landon, as the easy winner, Gallup reflected on the aims of polling. He touted it as a serious instrument of democratic reform, calling it the “sampling referendum.”

Going further, Gallup envisioned an up-scaling of the democracy of the New England town meeting to the whole nation

“Today, the New England town meeting idea has, in a sense, been restored. The wide distribution of daily newspapers reporting the views of statesmen on issues of the day, the almost universal ownership of radios which bring the whole nation with the hearing of any voice, and now the advent of the sampling referendum which produces a means of

determining quickly the response of the public to debate on issues of the day, have in effect created a town meeting on a national scale.”(Gallup 1939)

Gallup thought that the media and polling would together allow people to hear political leaders’ opinions and both hear and express their own.

Good modern polling, based on random sampling does serve political equality, since simple random sampling is just selection by lot, but it still entails no real deliberation. Thus most of the opinions captured by conventional polling are cognitively threadbare. The typical respondent answering the typical political attitude item has barely ever thought about the question before being interviewed and can call on precious little information in answering it. These top-of-the-head responses are what Converse (1964) famously called “nonattitudes,” although “minimal attitudes” (Luskin 1987) may more often be closer to the still-sad reality.

So conventional polling has inevitably disappointed Gallup’s hopes. It has indeed altered the texture of modern democracy, but not by taking it any closer to the virtues of the New England town meeting.<sup>6</sup> The opinions it tallies are not informed by any thorough airing and consideration of alternative views. Rather, they reflect normal, everyday levels of inattention and disengagement. They express public opinion as it is—seasoned strongly by neither information nor reflection.

### **Deliberative Polling and Deliberative Democracy**

But what if the level of deliberation could be raised, if not for the whole public, at least for a random sample thereof? What if polling could be made deliberative? Deliberative Polling (Fishkin 1991, 1995) explores this possibility by exposing random samples to balanced information, encouraging them to weigh opposing arguments in discussions with heterogeneous

interlocutors, and then harvesting their more considered opinions. It is a way, at least in miniature, of serving both deliberation and equality. The deliberation lies in the learning, thinking, and talking distinguishing Deliberative Polls from conventional ones. The political equality stems from random sampling (which may be clustered or proportionally stratified but never disproportionately stratified). In theory, every citizen has an equal chance of being chosen to participate, and on average, over infinitely repeated sampling from the same population, the sample would resemble the population exactly.

This solution to the problem of combining political equality and deliberation actually dates back to ancient Athens, where deliberative microcosms of several hundred chosen by lot made many key decisions. With the demise of Athenian democracy, it fell into desuetude, then oblivion. As noted, the public opinion poll revived random sampling but without deliberation. Deliberative Polling, in recombining the two, is an empirical exploration of deliberative democracy.

To flesh out some more of the design, a Deliberative Poll begins by drawing and interviewing a random sample. It is important for representativeness and political equality that the sampling be random rather than by self-selection, proximity (“convenience sampling”), or quota. Only random sampling assures everyone an equal probability of being chosen to participate. Only random sampling leads to samples that average out, over infinitely repeated sampling, to the population. Only random sampling allows measurement of the degree of certainty associated in the sample estimates (in the form of “estimated standard errors,” “margins of error,” “confidence intervals,” “levels of statistical significance,” etc.)

In practice, of course, not all random samples are equally random. But the survey houses we have hired to do the sampling, initial interviewing, and data collection—the National Centre

for Social Research (NCSR), *née* Social and Community Planning Research (SCPR), in the U.K.; Alpha Research in Bulgaria; Newpoll in Australia; and the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago, the Survey Research Center of the University of California at Berkeley, Delta Strategies, and Knowledge Networks in the U.S.—have included some of the best in the world. The level of care and consequent quality of the interview sample have been high.

At the end of the interview, all the respondents are invited to participate in the deliberative part of the Deliberative Poll. The percentage agreeing to attend has run mostly in the 35-60% range for national Deliberative Polls (indeed mostly above 50% outside the U.K.), decidedly lower for the regional ones. Those who choose to attend are an admittedly self-selected subsample, but we find that the far greater than usual incentives for participation—a nontrivial honorarium, an all expenses-paid weekend in a nice hotel away from home, the chance, in the national events, of meeting and talking with people from all over the country, the chance of speaking directly (in the plenary sessions) and indirectly (through the dissemination of results) to decision-makers, and the chance of being on television—attract a representative subsample. (See the further discussion below.)

Those agreeing to participate are sent carefully balanced briefing materials, laying out the major arguments for and against policy proposals prominent in elite-level discussions. Embedded in these arguments are both empirical premises, which are relatively debatable, and more purely factual information, which is not. The document, which is also made publicly available, is meant to provide a starting point for discussion. Typically, it is vetted by an advisory board of stakeholders on the issue who scrutinize it for balance and accuracy.

The participants are then brought to a single site for the deliberations, typically lasting a weekend. During the weekend, they alternate between discussions in randomly assigned small groups and putting questions formed in the small group discussion to panels of policy experts and policy-makers in plenary sessions. The small-groups are led by trained moderators, who maintain an atmosphere of civility and mutual respect, encourage the diffident, restrain the too-voluble, and ensure that all the major proposals and all the major arguments for and against them in the briefing document get aired.

The panelists in the plenary sessions respond to the questions formed in the small groups. These are not simple questions of fact, to which there are undebatably right and wrong answers. Rather, they concern the policy alternatives' consequences and costs, the tradeoffs they may entail, and the like. Given that the answers are generally debatable—indeed are the stuff of debate—it is important that the panelists represent a balanced set of perspectives. The composition of the panels, like the briefing document, is often supervised by an advisory board.

The participants answer questions about their views both when first interviewed (just before being invited to participate) and again at the end of the deliberative weekend. A good many DPs add one or more (quasi) control groups—independent random samples who do not deliberate—to provide assurance that the changes we see stem from the deliberative treatment rather than from contemporaneous great-world influences affecting everyone.<sup>7</sup>

The treatment, consisting of everything that happens between the moment of recruitment and the end of the weekend, can be broken down into several weeks of unstructured, at-home deliberation anticipating the weekend and the structured on-site deliberation during the weekend itself. During the anticipatory period, the participants, knowing that they will be part of a visible (usually televised) event, begin to discuss the issues more with family, friends, and coworkers, to

pay more attention to relevant stories in the media, and even, in some cases, to research the issues in library or on the web.

This anticipatory deliberation, while important, is less than ideal in a couple of respects. It is, for one thing, socially homogeneous. People tend to talk with people like themselves—from the same social circles and circumstances. In the second place, like most real world deliberation, it is imbalanced. People tend to turn to sources of information and conversational partners they already agree with. On-site, by contrast, the discussion is balanced (thanks, as necessary, to the moderators), and the discussion groups mostly heterogeneous (thanks to random assignment). The anticipatory deliberation is real-world deliberation, with its existing limitation, only quantitatively greater. The on-site deliberation is not only quantitatively greater but different—closer to the deliberative ideal. The briefing documents and expert panels are balanced, the moderators enforce balance in the small group discussions, and random assignment makes for heterogeneous discussion partners. In short, the participants are forced to consider alternative arguments and points of view and to discuss them with others very unlike themselves.

The on-site deliberations have typically been telecast in one fashion or another. Often the plenary sessions have been broadcast. Sometimes both they and some of the small group discussions are taped and edited for later broadcast. The Deliberative Poll has been called “a poll with a human face” (McCombs and Reynolds 1999) because it puts a human face—and voice—on the process of informed opinion change.

So far there have been twenty-two Deliberative Polls around the world, twenty face-to-face and two online. Eleven of the face-to-face DPs have been national—five in Britain (on crime, Britain’s future in Europe, the Monarchy, the 1997 British General Election, and the future of the National Health Service), one in Denmark (on the 2000 referendum on Denmark’s

adopting the Euro), one in Bulgaria (on crime), two in Australia (on the 1999 referendum on Australia's becoming a republic and on the 2001 referendum on reconciliation with the Aboriginals), and two in the U.S. (the first on issues of foreign policy, the American family and economics, the second on foreign policy on brink of the war with Iraq). Nine have been local or regional (all in the U.S.), eight of them on "Integrated Resource Planning" for electric utilities in and around Texas, and the remaining one on the future of the local airport and the possibility of regional revenue sharing in New Haven, Connecticut and environs. The two online DPs, both national and both in the U.S., have concerned one on America's role in the world and one on the American primary process.)

The online Deliberative Polls, a new variant on the basic design, need a separate word. The key to making online Deliberative Polling feasible is to draw a random sample of the whole population, not just those already online. We have used samples drawn by Knowledge Networks, which draws true random samples offline, then provides those respondents lacking web access with web TVs. We have upped the ante by giving personal computers, not just web TVs, to participants who do not already have them. We also provide them with web access and with training in using the computer and the web. A second key design feature is to use voice- rather than text-based discussion to avoid handicapping or discouraging the less literate. Lotus Sametime software does this nicely. In these DPs, the questionnaires are all administered online. (For more on online Deliberative Polling, see Luskin, Fishkin, and Iyengar 2004 and Iyengar, Luskin, and Fishkin 2004.)

The great advantage of online Deliberative Polling is its substantially lower cost. Transportation, meals, and lodging no longer need paying for. Even the cost of providing free computers to some respondents is minor in comparison. Another advantage is superior

instrumentation. It is possible to track the participants' contributions to the small group discussions and their usage of the briefing materials automatically. The chief disadvantage is that the deliberation may be less vivid and the experimental treatment thus weaker, than in the face-to-face design. Preliminary results confirm this suspicion but suggest that the difference is modest enough to make the tradeoff well worth considering (Luskin, Fishkin, and Iyengar 2004).

### **Deliberative Polling and the Objections to Deliberative Democracy**

Not everyone working in this intersection of political theory and empirical political science is a fan of deliberative democracy. Three prominent objections can be characterized as:

*Defeatist.* This objection is that deliberation is *impossible*. The public is too confused, inconsistent, and ignorant to be able to be worth consulting about policy issues (Schumpeter 1942, Lippmann 1942, and more recently Posner 2004a, 2004b). Any efforts to consult a "public voice" will be delusive, so it is best not to try.

*Extenuationist.* This second objection is that deliberation is *unnecessary*. The public can use heuristics and simple cues to approximate its more informed preferences (Popkin 1992, Lupia and McCubbins 1998). Deliberation is thus a waste of time.<sup>8</sup>

*Alarmist.* The third objection is that deliberation is *harmful*. It can be done (*contra* the defeatists) and can alter preferences (*contra* the extenuationists) but alters them for the worse. Inevitably, certain groups—and their preferences—are advantaged in public discussion (Sanders 1997). Within discussion groups, moreover, majorities tend to become larger and opinions more extreme—not as a function of the strength of competing arguments but simply as a function of the initial balance of opinion (Sunstein 2003).

Deliberative Polling provides a means of examining these objections empirically. The results say something about whether or not the mass public is capable of deliberation, something about the extent to which deliberation makes a difference, and something about the extent to which it polarizes preferences across discussion groups and privileges certain people's preferences within them.

Here are some relevant patterns in the results of the analyses we have done to date:

1. *The participants are representative.* We start with high quality random samples, then compare the respondents who choose to attend, an admittedly self-selected subsample, with those who do not. Both demographically and attitudinally, the statistically significant differences are remarkably few and typically modest. The participants are generally a bit older, better educated, and more interested in and knowledgeable about the topic than the nonparticipants, but not by much. The usual biases in self-selection appear to be nearly erased by the unusual incentives for participation. Thus the participant sample, like the interview sample, is highly representative. Political equality is served.
2. *Opinions often change.* At the individual level, some opinions always change, with some participants moving one, and some the other. Some portion of that could be just the random bouncing-around of still-underdeveloped attitudes. But more impressively and consequentially, there is usually some statistically significant net change as well. More than half of the policy attitude items we have posed have shown statistically significant net change, as have a still larger fraction of the much smaller number questions about vote intention. Some of these changes have been extremely large.
3. *Vote intentions often change.* These changes have tended to be still more statistically significant, as well as substantively larger. In Britain on the eve of the 1997 general

election, for example, the Tories and Labour each lost about 10% and the Liberal Democrats gained about 20% of our sample's votes. In Australia in 1999, support for the referendum proposal to make the country a Republic increased by 16%. Only in the case of the 2000 Danish referendum on the Euro was there no appreciable change, presumably because the Danish the public was already comparatively well informed about EU matters after six previous referendums on them (Hansen2003).

4. *The participants gain information.* We regularly ask questions gauging the factual information the participants possess about the topics under discussion. Less regularly, we add a question or two tapping more general political knowledge, as of the party's locations on a liberal-conservative or left-right dimension. The results show impressive information gains. Not everybody masters every fact, to be sure, but it is a rare topic-specific information item that does not show a statistically significant average gain. Mean gains of around 10% are extremely common. Some are distinctly larger, a few gigantic. In the 1999 Australian Deliberative Poll on the country's becoming a republic, the percentage knowing that "under the referendum proposal, the prime minister "could remove the president at any time but must later obtain approval from the house of representatives" rose from 16 to 73%. The participants also seem to gain some greater knowledge of politics more generally, as the percentages correctly locating the major parties on a liberal-conservative or left-right scale generally increase.
5. *The changes in opinions and votes and the information gains are related.* By and large, the preference changes are information-driven, in the sense that it is the participants who emerge knowing the most who disproportionately account for the net change in the sample as a whole.

6. *The changes in opinions and votes are unrelated to social location.* Regressions of both signed and absolute preference change on the panoply of available sociodemographic variables produce  $R^2$ s just barely above zero, precious few statistically significant individual coefficient estimates, and insignificant F-statistics (meaning that the null hypothesis that none of the regressors has any effect cannot confidently be rejected). There is no appreciable tendency for people of given sorts to change more one in one direction than the other, nor to change to greater or lesser degree.
7. *Policy attitudes and vote intentions tend to be more predictable, and predictable on the basis of normatively preferable criteria after deliberation than before.* Thus regressions of policy attitudes on collections of values and empirical premises that ought to affect them carry bigger adjusted  $R^2$ s after deliberation than before. Similarly, U.S. primary election voters tend to give much greater weight than the control group to the candidates' policy positions in deciding how to vote (Iyengar, Luskin, and Fishkin 2004).
8. *Single-Peakedness increases.* Defining single-peakedness as a matter of degree (as the size of the largest subset whose policy preferences are single-peaked in the traditional binary sense, divided by the size of the sample), we find that deliberation increases single-peakedness, at least on issues that are not already highly salient and where preferences are not already single-peaked (List et al. 2000). The participants may not agree more after deliberating, but they do seem to agree more in this sense about what they are agreeing or disagreeing about. The importance of this result is that single-peakedness (in this continuous sense) reduces the probability of Arrowian preference cycles undermining the meaning of majority rule.

9. *The increases in single-peakedness and information gains are related.* The increases in single-peakedness stem primarily from those participants emerging most informed (List et al. 2000).
10. *Preferences do not necessarily “polarize” across discussion groups.* Sunstein’s (xxxx) arguments would lead one to expect that they should. But about half the small groups polarize, but about half do not.<sup>9</sup>
11. *Preferences do not necessarily homogenize within groups.* Conformity mechanisms would lead one to expect convergence. Or, to the extent that the initial distribution of opinions affects the distribution of arguments expressed, initially popular positions may simply receive more support in the discussion, which might also produce convergence. In fact, however, the variance of opinion sometimes decreases, sometimes increases. One reason may be that the moderators, enforcing balance, keep the distribution of opinions expressed from resembling too closely the initial distribution of opinions.
12. *Balanced deliberation tends to promote balanced learning.* Given facts are sometimes more comfortable for one side of an argument than the other. Our evidence in this case comes from just one Deliberative Poll. In the Danish Deliberative Poll before the Euro referendum, some of the factual information were more comforting to the “yes” camp, some to the “no” camp. We also, uncharacteristically, had an additional wave of measurement on arrival on-site. Thus we could see that in the period leading up to the deliberative weekend, during which the participants deliberated with family, friends, and coworkers in imbalanced fashion, yes supporters learned more of the “yes facts,” and no supporters more of the “no facts” but that during the weekend itself, with its balanced

deliberation, the yes supporters picked up more of the “no facts” they had hitherto avoided, and the no supporters more of the “yes facts” they had avoided (Hansen 2003).

What, then, do these results say about the objections to deliberative democracy? First, defeatism. One suggestive result is 6. That the changes of opinion and vote intention are largely uninfluenced by sociodemographic factors, including education suggests that the process seems to be accessible to all social strata. Other relevant results are that the participants learn quite a lot and that the opinion changes tend to be driven by that learning. People may ordinarily not know or think much about politics and have poorly developed political views as a result, but it is clearly possible for them to learn and thus change their views as appropriate. Not every participant learns or changes measurably in a Deliberative Poll, but many do.

In addition, 8. and 9. indicate that deliberation lessens the collective confusions of mass democracy, creating a shared public space for public opinion. Hence Posner’s (2004) claim that public consultation will lead to confusion and the antinomies of rational choice is exactly wrong. If anything, the desirability of avoiding preference cycles argues *for* deliberation, although we note Mackie’s (2004) recent argument that Riker’s (1982) anxieties about cycles were overstated from the beginning (Mackie 2004).

Next, extenuationism. The implication of the extenuationist position is that getting people to learn and think about an issue should not greatly change their views. They are already at or near their “full-information” preferences. But 2. and 3., backed up by 4. and 5., falsify this claim. So, only a shade less directly, does 7. Post-deliberation attitudes and vote intentions are different, sometimes dramatically different—because many of the participants are thinking and learning more about the issues, and realizing that the positions they initially held were not where they really wanted to be.

Finally, alarmism. Sunstein's (2003) "law of group polarization" is that a discussion group whose mean position is one side of an attitude scale will tend, post-discussion, to move further out on the same side. He points to two reasons for this effect: the imbalance in the argument pool and "social comparison" (conformity) mechanisms. The evidence from mock jury experiments does seem to support Sunstein's position.

But our small groups are not juries, and the kind of deliberation we are seeking to foster is not that of the jury room. There is no immediate collective outcome—no verdict—to be reached and no requirement of consensus, not to mention unanimity.<sup>10</sup> The "voting," moreover, occurs only in the "secret ballot" of the final confidential questionnaire, which may limit social comparison effects. The deliberation in a Deliberative Poll is mainly everyday political conversation improved—more informed, more balanced, more conscientious, more meritocratic, and more comprehensive. And of course more of it. The element of balance may be particularly important, in equalizing the argument pool. Thus 10. and to some extent 11. indicate, as Sunstein (2003) himself has acknowledged, that Deliberative Polling data do not support the "law of group polarization."

The other deliberative pathology cited by alarmists is the domination of the discussions by more privileged members of the society, presumptively well educated and articulate white males. In this case, we can report only impressions—both ours and the participants'—but have the data to do more. It should be noted that the moderators try to ensure that no one dominates the discussion and that everyone has a chance to talk, but the extent to which they succeed in this effort is an empirical question. One relevant observation is that overwhelming majorities of the participants indicate, in response to a question in post-deliberation questionnaire, that in their view no few participants dominated the discussion. That is our impression too. Sometimes the

moderator has to restrain a particularly voluble participant or two to achieve this result, but usually that is not even necessary. A simple, less subjective approach we intend trying would be to see if the other participants routinely move in the direction of the views the members of privileged groups (say, educated white males) come in with. We hope to report on this in the near future. At some later point, more ambitiously, we hope to analyze recordings of small group sessions with this among many other issues in mind.

### **From Thought Experiments to Real Experiments**

“Thought experiments” imagining what people would decide under morally relevant counterfactual conditions have become a staple of contemporary political theory (for an overview see Fishkin 1992). But why not move beyond arm chair empiricism? If a counterfactual situation is morally relevant, why not do a real social science experiment to see what the appropriate counterfactual might actually look like? And if that counterfactual is both discoverable and normatively relevant, why not then let the rest of the world know about it?

Like Rawls’s “original position,” Deliberative Polling, in gauging what people *would* think if they thought, knew, and talked more about the issues, has some recommending force—to policy-makers and, at least conditionally, to the public itself. While citizens should consider the merits of policy and electoral choices for themselves, they do take cues from conventional polling results. Deliberative polling offers similar but better cues, resting on a more informed and thoughtful consideration of the issues by the sample.

The experimental treatment is avowedly—intentionally—aimed at creating a counterfactual. The treatment sets the participants to deliberating more intensively than most but perhaps not quite all of them ever do in real life—certainly not more intensively than people who practice, study, or report on politics for a living ever do. The counterfactuality lies in the

proportion of the sample who are deliberating this intensively, and the most counterfactual element may be quality rather than the quantity of the discussion: the degree to which it is informed, balanced, meritocratic, conscientious, and comprehensive. But this is actually not much different from what most experiments do. Each explanatory variable has some naturally occurring range, and the object of the treatment is sometimes to move individual subjects up or down within that range, sometimes to move them above or below it. How many people spend significant time comparing the lengths of lines projected onto a screen in front of them, in the company of other people insisting that obviously shorter lines are longer, to cite one famous example? But even if it were not common in everyday experimentation, the counterfactuality in Deliberative Polling would be essential. The key in this effort to fuse normative and empirical research agendas is to create a treatment condition embodying the appropriate normative relevance.

The design has—and needs—both *internal* and *external validity*, the well known distinction being that internal validity concerns questions of cause and effect, while external concerns questions of generalization. How sure can we be that  $x$ 's apparent effect on  $y$  really  $x$ 's effect on  $y$ , rather than either  $y$ 's effect on  $x$  or the effect of some other variable  $z$  confounded with  $x$ ? That is the question of internal validity. How sure can we be that the treatments, measurements, and subjects generalize to the outside-world phenomena we are trying to characterize? That is the question of external validity. Well done surveys are high on external validity, well done experiments high on internal validity.

What is important to us is to get a maximally reliable picture of a counterfactual public forming and revising its opinions under normatively desirable conditions. High internal validity implies some assurance that any changes of opinion stem from the deliberative treatment (and

mediating variables like information). High external validity implies some assurance that what we see is what we would see if we could subject the whole public to the same treatment.

Without the former, we could not have much confidence we were seeing *deliberative* public opinion. Without the latter, we could not have much confidence we were seeing *deliberative public* opinion.

Many questions remain, above all concerning the contributions of the individual elements of the deliberative treatment. How much does each of the qualities we have incorporated into our definition of deliberation matter? How much difference would it make to keep the treatment the same but settle for real-world levels of balance, say? How much does the presence and behavior of the moderators matter? The sociodemographic and attitudinal heterogeneity of the small groups? How much of the effect occurs during the anticipatory period, and how much during the weekend? How much difference do the briefing materials make? What difference would it make to replace them with easy access to a variety of real-world journals of opinion like the *New Republic* and the *National Review* (which might increase information but would surely reduce balance)? What difference would it make to the occurrence of polarization in Sunstein's sense to make the harvesting of opinions less confidential? And so forth. We have only begun to the details of how deliberation produces the effects we have documented.

While our picture of the effects of deliberation is incomplete, the DP research program already offers detailed lines of response to the three objections to deliberative democracy—defeatist, extenuationist, and alarmist. If those responses continue to hold up in light of further empirical investigation, the DP will constitute a useful realization of deliberative democracy. It will embody two values that have bedeviled a great deal of democratic reform by having previously resisted simultaneous realization—deliberation and political equality.

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<sup>1</sup>Of course some nontrivial inequality remains (Dahl 2002).

<sup>2</sup>For more on the qualities of deliberation see Fishkin (1991).

<sup>3</sup>Alternatively, we could define deliberation simply as discussion, the distinguish different kinds of deliberation—balanced versus imbalanced, etc. Here we make deliberation balanced by definition. See Luskin (2003).

<sup>4</sup> We have simplified matters somewhat by defining deliberation as a process of discussion. At its core, deliberation is a process of thought, or rumination, that will have the five characteristics just mentioned to a significant degree. In theory, some have speculated that it could be achieved internally (see Goodin 2002) by individuals thinking in isolation. We do not wish to rule out this theoretical possibility, particularly with the development of new technologies that might substitute for a dialogue with others. However, for the moment we stipulate that deliberation requires interpersonal communication because the only way in which we are aware that the five characteristics listed above could be achieved to a significant degree is through interpersonal dialogue. . And all our empirical efforts to explore it will involve interpersonal communication-- conversation either face to face or online via voice.

<sup>5</sup>See Fishkin (1992) for an account of how even apparently trivial differences in the characterization of the initial choice situation can lead to dramatically different principles. By having a "thin" characterization of the decision process and by allowing the participants in the deliberative process to complete the decision through an actual experiment, we can avoid the apparent arbitrariness of selecting one characterization of

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the choice situation over another as a way to settle normative issues.

<sup>6</sup>To be sure, even the New England town meeting may not actually have all the virtues of the New England town meeting. See Mansbridge (xxxx) and Bryan (xxxx).

<sup>7</sup>The control group observations may be either post-test only or pre-test and post-test (as in Iyengar, Luskin, and Fishkin 2004, Luskin, Fishkin, and Iyengar 2004). In either case, the design becomes a relatively strong quasi-experiment in Campbell and Stanley's (xxxx) terms.

<sup>8</sup>The term "extenuationist(m)" is from Luskin (2002).

<sup>9</sup>The exact numbers depend on the point of reference with respect to which the groups could be said to be becoming more or less extreme. See Luskin, Fishkin, and Jowell (2002) and Luskin, Fishkin, and Iyengar (2004).

<sup>10</sup>The only consensus ever sought in a Deliberative Poll is that a *question* would be worth asking of the panelists in an ensuing plenary session. But questions are generally chosen precisely because the group members *disagree* over the answer.