

Strategies of Public Consultation

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Abstract

Methods for consulting the public are classified according to a scheme that considers the method of selection and the forms of public opinion solicited. The major approaches are considered for their merits and limitations. The methods discussed include self selected forums, polls, discussion groups, citizen juries, conventional polls and Deliberative Polls. Applications are considered from various countries and the contrast between conventional polls and Deliberative Polls is a principal topic.

Keywords: Public consultation, Deliberative democracy, Deliberative polling, Public opinion polling

Efforts to consult the public must begin with plausible answers to two fundamental questions: who and what? First, who is consulted—how are those who supposedly represent the public selected? Second, what kinds of preferences on the part of the mass public are given voice? Are the preferences the public's considered judgments? Or are they simply “top of the head” impressions of sound bites and headlines?

Underlying these two questions are two value commitments that have a long history in democratic theory—inclusion and thoughtfulness. Ideally, an institutional design for public consultation should somehow include (be open to, or be representative of) everyone and the preferences solicited should in some sense be thoughtful—they should represent what the public would support on reflection or under reasonably good conditions for considering the question at issue. Both of these basic value commitments will get further specification as we consider various distortions that often apply to public consultation.

First, consider problems that arise with answers to the “who” question. Many forms of public consultation, in the name of openness, are available to virtually anyone who wishes to volunteer his or her voice. However, while the openness and transparency of such efforts serve some democratic aspirations, such methods are vulnerable to two basic difficulties: 1) Unrepresentativeness and 2) Capture. The unrepresentativeness comes about because the willingness to go to the trouble of showing up at an open meeting or public hearing will

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vary with intensity of opinion and organization. Those who do not feel strongly, or who lack organization are more likely to stay home.¹ Second, when open processes are sufficiently swamped by mobilizing groups, then the apparent public voice has simply been captured. Some interest group ends up speaking for “we the people,” and in effect, masquerading as the voice of the entire public. We will return to such cases below under the heading of the dangers of self selection.

Second, consider a few of the key distortions that can arise in answers to the “what” question. A partial listing would include the fact that public opinion can be

1. Uninformed,
2. Misinformed,
3. Informed but in a strategically incomplete manner,
4. Manipulated.

The public tends to be uninformed on most complex policy issues for reasons we will explore below. But lack of information is only the most obvious debilitation. The public can also have information, but it can be incorrect. Large percentages of the American public went into the 2004 presidential campaign believing that weapons of mass destruction had been found in Iraq and that there were known and direct links between Iraq and the 911 terror attacks.² Also, sometimes the public can have correct information but it can be strategically incomplete. It can be the sort of information that has an obvious counter—if only the public were aware of the other side of the argument. For example, campaigns for “clean coal” tout the comparative merit of clean coal compared to dirty coal, but in the name of tax incentives that would lead to clean coal replacing alternative forms of energy (natural gas and renewables) that are vastly cleaner. Arguments that clean coal is cleaner than dirty coal are strategically incomplete because the merits of clean coal need to be judged against the other alternatives available. Strategically incomplete but accurate advocacy is often key to advertising campaigns designed to influence legislation. In some of the forms of public consultation we have experimented with (Deliberative Polls) the coal advocates have had to share the stage with advocates of other forms of energy so that the arguments and counterarguments of key alternatives could all be laid out in the same forum.

Another form of distortion is manipulation. Manipulation may occur when political actors use any of the other three debilitations—public lack of information, misinformation, strategically incomplete information, to move opinion to a desired and pre-determined outcome that would otherwise be unlikely to arise—that the public would likely not support if this debilitation were overcome (if it were more informed, more accurately informed, or more completely informed).

¹For a good case study and some theoretical context, see Fiorina (1999)

²See, for example, http://www.pipa.org/OnlineReports/Iraq/Report08_20_04.pdf for one set of poll results on both WMD and Iraq in late August of 2004.

Table 1: Eight Forms of Public Consultation

	Method of Selection			
	1. Self-selection	2. Non-random Sample	3. Random Sample	4. “Everyone”
A. Raw Public Opinion	1A SLOPs	2A Some Polls	3A Most Polls	4A Referendum Democracy
B. Refined Public Opinion	1B Discussion Groups	2B Citizens’ Juries, etc.	3B Deliberative Polls	4B “Deliberation Day”

As we review various strategies of public consultation, it is worth keeping these distortions in mind to see if any particular institutional designs are more likely to avoid them than others.

The simple classification in [Table 1](#) applies to the most common approaches to answering our two basic questions in public consultation: what and who?

When considering forms of public opinion or the preferences solicited, let us say that opinion is “refined” if it is the product of deliberation exposing it to a wide range of alternative views supported by sincere arguments and reasonably accurate information. Refined opinion is informed—informed about competing views and facts sincerely viewed as relevant by proponents of different positions. People are aware of the arguments and counterarguments and have reflected on them. By contrast, we will say that opinion is “raw” if it is not the product of such deliberation.

The other distinction concerns whose opinion is being consulted. While the classifications here do not exhaust all the possibilities, they cover the principal practical alternatives. The people consulted can be self-selected; they can be selected by some method of sampling that attempts to be representative without probability sampling; they can be chosen by random sampling; or they can constitute virtually all voters (or members of the group being consulted). When these two dimensions are combined, then the eight possibilities in the above chart emerge.

First, I will fill out these categories and second, I will turn to which possibilities offer the prospect of dealing with the distortions detailed above.

The first category, 1A is already being implemented, especially on the internet. Norman Bradburn of the University of Chicago has coined an acronym SLOP for “self-selected listener opinion poll”. Before the internet, radio call-in shows would commonly ask for responses by telephone to some topic. The respondents to SLOPs are not selected by scientific random sampling as in public opinion polls. The respondents instead, simply select themselves. They are

predominantly those who feel more intensely or feel especially motivated. Sometimes, they are organized. The SLOP, it is thought, gets “grass roots” opinion. However, in the parlance of American lobbyists, sometimes the response is something more organized and synthetic—the impression of grass roots that is really “astroturf”.

A good example of the dangers of SLOPs came with the world consultation that Time magazine organized about the “person of the century.” Time asked for votes in several categories, including greatest thinker, greatest statesman, greatest entertainer, greatest captain of industry. Strangely, one person got by far the most votes in every category, and it turned out to be the same person. Who was this person who towered above all rivals in every category? Atatürk. The people of Turkey organized to vote, by post card, on the internet, by fax and produced millions more votes, as a matter of national pride, than the rest of the world could muster for any candidate, just through individual, unorganized voting (Morris et al., 1997). Of course, Atatürk was a towering historical figure. But the fact that he greatly surpassed all rivals (Winston Churchill, Albert Einstein, etc.) in every category shows the distorted nature of SLOPs.

Media organizations routinely conduct SLOPs on the internet on a wide range of political or social matters. A SLOP involves visitors to a web site, gives people a sense of empowerment (they are registering their opinions) but it produces data that is misleading, that offers only a distorted picture of public opinion. To take just one example, SLOPs, at the time of impeachment in the US routinely showed large majorities in favor, while scientific polls showed a completely different picture. Those feeling most intensely bothered to register their views, sometimes more than once.

It is often thought that technology might facilitate the better realization of ancient forms of democracy. But SLOPs hark back to the practices of ancient Sparta, not ancient Athens. In Sparta there was a practice called the Shout, where candidates could pack the hall and the one who got the most applause was the one elected (Plutarch, 1988). Later we will turn to a different category that realizes Athenian rather than Spartan democracy.

The difficulty with category 1A is that it offers a picture of public opinion that is neither representative nor deliberative. It offers a picture of uninformed opinion that is also distorted and partial in who it includes. If it is a mirror of public opinion, it is more like a carnival fun house mirror than one that reproduces what it reflects.

An alternative to the SLOPs of category 1A is the possibility of serious deliberation, refined public opinion, produced among self-selected groups. Discussion groups fill out Category 1B. If the discussion groups offer the opportunity to weigh the main alternative arguments that fellow citizens would want raised on an issue, then they can achieve a measure of deliberation on an issue even if the participants are not a good mirror of the entire population. The Kettering Foundation supports a large network of “National Issues Forums” (NIF) in the US and in several other countries, in which thousands of self-selected participants deliberate conscientiously and sincerely with briefing materials that offer a balanced and accurate basis for discussion (For a good overview of these activities

and the vision behind them, see [Mathews, 1994](#)). These participants meet in churches, schools, neighborhood venues and spend hours in serious consideration of the alternatives. However, their conclusions, while filtered or deliberative, are not representative of the views of the entire public.

While there are many discussion forums on the internet, it is worth pausing to note the difference between deliberative practices on the internet and those in face to face discussion. When NIF participants gather for a discussion forum, they can evaluate each others' verbal arguments face to face; they have an extended period for arguments and concerns on one side to be answered by responses on an opposing side, they have an agenda of materials that cover the issue to make sure that they are at least aware of the main alternative arguments that have been previously voiced and they have a moderator to ensure that everyone in the forum talks, that no one dominates the discussion and that there is an atmosphere of mutual respect that permits the respondents to listen to each other.

Can such a forum be reproduced on the internet? One difficulty is that the internet in its present form tends to be text based. The visual and verbal expression of a face to face discussion is one that is open to participants even if they are less educated or less comfortable with written materials. An NIF forum lasting a few hours gets a concentrated dose of attention and participation. Many forums on the internet involve respondents for only brief bursts of activity. Internet democracy sometimes seems as if it is suited for citizens with attention deficit disorder, zooming from one site to another rather than offering sustained dialogue. On the other hand, the internet offers the advantage that it is especially suited to asynchronous communication. People do not all have to be active at the same moment. Issues raised at one point can be responded to at a different time. In addition to the convenience asynchronous communication offers, it has the advantage that it may promote thought and reflection over a more extended period of time.

As technology improves we can imagine that non-text based, face to face discussion will become easier and easier. As broadband spreads, the interactions could approach something more like two way television as opposed to an exchange of emails. As educational institutions attempt to adapt classes to the internet the same apparatus of discussion useful for education can be used for democracy. And as the availability of access to the internet spreads, access to the poorer and less literate strata of the population will mean that self-selected forums or discussion groups are not just from one side of the digital divide.

As discussion methods become better adapted to the internet, even for the less literate, the use of on-line discussion groups serves the value of democratic deliberation. It contributes to creating more informed citizens. They do not, however, achieve the basic goal of realizing both of the values under discussion simultaneously. If the voice of the people is both representative and deliberative, then it combines major elements of inclusiveness and thoughtfulness. SLOPs are neither. Discussion groups achieve deliberation among unrepresentative groups. For that reason they serve the enlightenment of the participants, but they do not offer a voice for "we the people".

Category 2A combines raw public opinion with methods of selection attempting to achieve some degree of representativeness—but that do not employ probability sampling. Some public opinion polls fall into this category. Those employing quota sampling, a practice still common in many democratic countries outside the U.S., justify their method as an attempt to approximate probability sampling. Some spectacular failures, such as the 1948 Dewey/Truman debacle and the 1992 British General Election have been blamed at least in part on the use of quota sampling (For the latter, see [Jowell & al, 1993](#)).

A much more rudimentary form of non-probability sampling has been employed on-line. Harris Interactive, for example, employs a large self-selected panel and applies weights to the responses to attempt to reflect American public opinion as a whole, including those who are not on-line. One can sign up to participate in the Harris Poll at a company sponsored web site.³ Any attempt to weight responses from those who first put themselves forward must be viewed as fundamentally different from methods in which the researchers first approach the respondents.

Category 2B employs non-random methods of selection with attempts to arrive at more deliberative public opinion. There are a variety of methods of public consultation that fit this category. So-called “citizen’s juries” use quota samples to select small numbers of participants (typically 12 or 18) to deliberate for several days or even weeks on public issues. Consensus Conferences begin with self-selection (soliciting respondents through newspaper ads) and then use quotas to attempt to approximate representativeness. These methods often suffer from the same problem noted above. They begin with self-selection and then employ such small numbers that any claims to representativeness cannot be credibly established.⁴

Category 3A, combining probability samples with raw opinion is exemplified, of course, by the public opinion poll in its most developed form. It avoids the distorted representativeness of SLOPs as well as the more modest distortions of non-random sampling. Just as Gallup vanquished the Literary Digest by using quota sampling for the effective launch of the public opinion poll in the 1936 US Presidential election, this category, 3A, trumps the SLOPs of 1A as well as the quota sampling of 2A.⁵

Public opinion polling reflecting raw public opinion offers a thin “top of the head” expression of the public voice. On complex policy or political questions, the views represented by polls are crippled by what Anthony Downs called “rational ignorance” ([Downs, 1957](#)). If I have only one vote in millions, why should I spend a lot of time and effort becoming informed (as we would like ideal citizens to do) when my individual vote or opinion will not make any appreciable difference? In addition, the views reported by polls on complex

³One registers at <http://vr.harrispollonline.com/register/register.asp>

⁴Another problem is that these research designs do not permit evaluation of how those agreeing to participate compare to those who do not.

⁵Gallup abandoned quota sampling after the 1948 election. The advantage of probability sampling was demonstrated by the success of the Survey Research Center at Michigan in that election.

political or policy matters are often crippled by a second factor—the tendency to report opinions that are not only based on little thought or reflection, but that may not exist at all. Phantom opinions or “non-attitudes” are reported by polls because respondents almost never wish to admit that they do not know, even when offered elaborate opportunities for saying so. Building on the classic work of Phil Converse of the University of Michigan, George Bishop and his colleagues at the University of Cincinnati dramatized this issue with their study of attitudes towards the so-called “Public Affairs Act of 1975.” Large percentages of the public offered an opinion even though the act was fictional. The Washington Post more recently celebrated the twentieth unanniversary of the non-existent “Public Affairs Act of 1975” by asking respondents about its “repeal”. The sample was split, with half being told that President Clinton wanted to repeal the act and half being told that the “Republican Congress” wanted its repeal. While such responses were based on a minimal amount of information (or misinformation provided to the participants, since the act did not exist in the first place) the information base was really just a response to a cue about who was for the proposal and who was against it (For a good overview of this work by George Bishop and the replication by the Washington Post under the direction of Richard Morin, see [Bishop, 2005](#)).

Scientific random samples are being experimented with for internet democracy. The difficulty of course, is that a large part of the population, even in the United States, is not on line. A pioneering effort is being made by Knowledge Networks to provide computers (webTV’s) to random samples of respondents. This step effectively opens up the possibility of credible survey research on the internet. However, it does not deal with the fact that just like any other form of good polling, the opinions represented in this kind of internet polling may be “top of the head” or nearly non-existent, when the public is inattentive or lacking in knowledge or information. However, as we shall see below, we are collaborating with Knowledge Networks to conduct Deliberative Polling online.

During this period when so much of the population does not have computer access that machines have to be provided, there are some additional practical difficulties. If machines, such as webTV’s are provided, then for how long?⁶ There are two sides to this problem—attrition and sensitization. The attrition problem is just that people who may sign on have to be maintained. In any panel people drop out and the representativeness of the sample must be monitored. That is a practical problem that can be dealt with by appropriate incentives (which of course will affect the expense) and which can be monitored by comparison to the original baseline sample or other surveys. If strong enough efforts are taken to keep the response rate high and to keep the panel intact, then there is no reason in principle why such a strategy should not do as well as good conventional surveys.

The second problem, sensitization occurs with any panel. Presumably, if people are being given computers, they are expected to participate for some

⁶Knowledge Networks is releasing participants after three years because of the sensitization problem. See [Lewis \(2000\)](#).

significant period of time. The longer they are self-conscious members of the panel, the more they are likely to diverge from the rest of the population. They will pay more attention knowing that they may be asked questions. Of course, the Deliberative Polling strategy we will discuss below faces the same problem. But Deliberative Polling does not present itself as offering a mirror of actual opinion, but rather a picture of counterfactual yet more informed opinion. Online panels may move somewhat in the direction of being more engaged and informed. There is the danger, to be monitored, that they will fall somewhere between being a good mirror of actual opinion on the one hand, and a good picture of really more informed opinion on the other.

Deliberative Polling, which fits in our category 3B, was developed explicitly to combine random sampling with deliberation. It is meant to include everyone under conditions where the public can think. Deliberative Polling attempts to employ social science to uncover what deliberative public opinion would be on an issue by conducting a quasi experiment, and then it inserts those deliberative conclusions into the actual public dialogue, or, in some cases, the actual policy process.

Deliberative Polling begins with a concern about the defects likely to be found in ordinary public opinion—the incentives for rational ignorance applying to the mass public and the tendency for sample surveys to turn up non-attitudes or phantom opinions (as well as very much “top of the head” opinions that approach being non-attitudes) on many public questions. At best, ordinary polls offer a snapshot of public opinion as it is, even when the public has little information, attention or interest in the issue. Deliberative Polling, by contrast, is meant to offer a representation of what the public would think about an issue under good conditions. Every aspect of the process is designed to facilitate informed and balanced discussion. After taking an initial survey, participants are invited for a weekend of face to face deliberation; they are given carefully balanced and vetted briefing materials to provide an initial basis for dialogue. They are randomly assigned to small groups for discussions with trained moderators, and encouraged to ask questions arising from the small group discussions to competing experts and politicians in larger plenary sessions. The moderators attempt to establish an atmosphere where participants listen to each other and no one is permitted to dominate the discussion. At the end of the weekend, participants take the same confidential questionnaire as on first contact and the resulting judgments in the final questionnaire are usually broadcast along with edited proceedings of the discussions throughout the weekend (For an overview, see [Fishkin, 1997](#). For more detailed analysis, see [Luskin et al., 2002](#)). The weekend microcosm tends to be highly representative, both attitudinally and demographically, as compared to the entire baseline survey and to census data about the population. In every case thus far, there have also been a number of large and statistically significant changes of opinion over the weekend. Considered judgments are often different from the top of the head attitudes solicited by conventional polls. Looking at the full panoply of Deliberative Polls, we believe that between half and two thirds of the policy attitudes change significantly following deliberation.

Consider three Deliberative Polling projects—a US national project on American foreign policy, the national Australian project before the Republic referendum and a series of regional Texas projects on the provision of electric power.

In the 2003 national Deliberative Poll broadcast on PBS about American foreign policy, the public went in thinking that foreign aid should be reduced or eliminated. However, this attitude was clearly tied to information (or misinformation). As in other polls at the time, they also had the impression that foreign aid was a substantial item in the US budget. Only 18% before deliberation knew (or guessed) that foreign aid was only 1% or less of the US budget. After deliberation, 64% knew (or guessed) the correct percentage and there was a majority for increasing it after deliberation.

In Australia, we organized a nationally televised Deliberative Poll in October 1999 (in partnership with Issues Deliberation Australia) before the referendum there on whether Australia should become a Republic. As in the US foreign policy project, there were large gains in information and large changes in opinion. For example, the average of five domain specific information items increased from 39% to 73% getting the answers correct. And the basic voting intention question, whether or not people would support a yes or no position on the referendum question proposing a Republic, changed from 57% to 73% in favour ([Issues Deliberation, 2006](#); [Luskin et al., 2005](#)).

In Texas, a series of eight Deliberative Polls were conducted in various parts of the state between 1996 and 1998 to determine public preferences, after deliberation, about the provision of electric power. Advisory groups of all the relevant stakeholders supervised the briefing materials, the questionnaires, the agenda for the weekend and the panels of competing experts. The Commissioners of the Texas Public Utility Commission observed the proceedings and answered questions from the sample at the end of the process. All eight projects produced broadly similar results—combinations of natural gas, investments in renewable energy and conservation. Strikingly, the participants were willing to pay slightly more on their monthly utility bills to promote renewable energy and conservation. Averaged over all eight projects, the percentage willing to pay at least \$1 more on their monthly bills for renewable energy increased from 52% to 84% and the percentage willing to pay more for conservation increased from 43% to 73%. While one might think a dollar is not much, the Public Utility Commission ended up requiring consumers in some districts to pay 25 cents a month more and the result, aggregated over millions of consumers was substantial enough to finance very considerable investments in renewable energy. As a direct result of the Deliberative Polls, Texas became the second leading state in renewable energy ([Lehr et al., 2003](#)). Here was a form of public consultation that resulted in representative and informed consumers willing to take a bit more responsibility for public problems and then having their input realized in new public policies (in this case primarily wind mills).

But what do the results represent? Our respondents are able to overcome the incentives for rational ignorance normally applying to the mass public. Instead of one vote in millions, they have, in effect, one vote in a few hundred in the weekend sample, and one voice in fifteen or so in the small group discussions.

The weekend is organized so as to make credible the claim that their voice matters. They overcome apathy, disconnection, inattention and initial lack of information. Participants from all social locations change in the deliberation. From knowing that someone is educated or not, economically advantaged or not, one cannot predict change in the deliberations. We do know, however, from knowledge items, that becoming informed on the issues predicts change on the policy attitudes. In that sense, deliberative public opinion is both informed and representative. As a result, it is also, almost inevitably, counter-factual. The public will rarely, if ever, be motivated to become as informed and engaged as during our weekend microcosms.

The idea is that if a counterfactual situation is morally relevant, why not do a serious social science experiment—rather than merely engage in informal inference or arm chair empiricism—to determine what the appropriate counterfactual might actually look like? And if that counterfactual situation is both discoverable and normatively relevant, why not then let the rest of the world know about it? Just as Rawls's original position can be thought of as having a kind of recommending force, the counterfactual representation of public opinion identified by the Deliberative Poll also recommends to the rest of the population some conclusions that they ought to take seriously. The idea may seem unusual in that it melds normative theory with an empirical agenda—to use social science to create quasi experiments that will uncover deliberative public opinion. But most social science experiments are aimed at creating a counterfactual—the effect of the treatment condition. In this effort to fuse normative and empirical research agendas, the trick is to identify a treatment condition that embodies the appropriate normative relevance.

Two general questions can be raised about all research designs—questions of internal and external validity (Campbell & Stanley, 1963). Sample surveys are relatively high on external validity: we can be fairly confident about generalizing the results to larger populations. By contrast, most social science experiments done in laboratory settings are high in internal validity: we can be fairly confident that the apparent effects are, indeed, the result of the experimental treatments. However, experiments done with college students, for example, lack a basis for external validity if the aim is to find out something about the general population.

If a social science experiment were to have relatively high internal validity, where we could be confident that the effects resulted from the normatively desirable treatment, and if it were also to have relatively high external validity where we could be confident about its generalizability to the entire citizen population, then the combination of those two properties would permit us to generalize the consequences of the normatively desirable property to the entire citizenry. We could be confident in the picture of a counterfactual public reaching its conclusions under normatively desirable conditions. In other words, if an experiment with deliberation were high on internal validity, then we could be confident that the conclusions were the result of deliberation (and related factors such as information). And if such an experiment were high on external validity then we could be confident about generalizing it to the relevant public of, say, all eligi-

ble voters. Only with both kinds of validity would the quasi experiment called Deliberative Polling have any claim to represent the considered judgments of the people.

We have just completed three full scale Deliberative Polling projects on the internet. The first, culminating in January 2002, was parallel to a national face to face Deliberative Poll on American foreign policy. The second took place during the Presidential primary season in 2004. The third was completed in the 2004 presidential election. In all three cases, the method was basically the same.

A national random sample recruited by Knowledge Networks deliberates in moderated small group discussions on a weekly basis. Computers are provided to those who do not have them. Microphones are provided to all participants so that the discussions can take place using voice rather than text. Special software is employed that allows the small group participants to keep track of who is talking, who wishes to talk next. On a weekly basis, the discussions proceed for an hour or an hour and fifteen minutes with carefully balanced briefing materials; during the discussions, the participants identify key questions that they wish competing experts to answer. Our media partner, MacNeil/Lehrer Productions (including the Online Newshour with Jim Lehrer) provide the competing expert answers and distribute them to the participants in between the weekly discussions. After several weeks of these discussions, the participants take the same survey as at the beginning. Meanwhile a separate control group that does not deliberate takes the same questionnaire at the beginning and end of the process.

In the online foreign policy Deliberative Poll, the results online were broadly similar to the face-to-face meetings. The respondents came to take more responsibility for world problems, preferring increases in foreign aid, more resources devoted to AIDS in Africa and world hunger, and more multilateral cooperation on military matters. These responses were plausibly connected to large increases in information (as measured by separate information questions). In the Presidential primary deliberative poll, the respondents also showed large increases in knowledge, both about policies and about the particular candidate positions. And in contrast to the control group, the issues played a major part in their candidate preferences. In the control group, the evaluation of candidate traits dwarfed all other factors, while in the deliberative treatment group, issues became very important as well.

In the most recent online study, there were also significant information gains as well as changes on some key opinion items about the war in Iraq and President Bush's tax cuts. These changes hold up in contrast to the control group. It is clear that significant numbers of the sample changed their views and their voting intentions. This online Deliberative Poll was parallel to 17 face to face Deliberative Polls held in conjunction with PBS stations in key cities around the country (Iyengar et al., 2004, 2003). The entire event was called "PBS Deliberation Day" and piloted the concept of Deliberation Day that we will discuss below.

Eventually, Deliberative Polling on the internet promises great advantages

in terms of cost and in terms of flexibility in the time required of participants. National Deliberative Polls require the logistics of national transportation, hotels and food. Two face to face Deliberative Polls have even had official airlines (American Airlines for the National Issues Convention in Austin, Texas and Ansett for Australia Deliberates). Face to face Deliberative Polls also require that respondents give up an entire weekend for the deliberations. While we have used funds to ameliorate practical difficulties (paying for child care and even in one case providing a researcher to milk a respondent's cows during her absence), it is obvious that we lose some respondents because of the demands we place on them. Internet based Deliberative Polls offer the promise of greater convenience and continuing dialogue.

Even in the best case for realizing category 3B there is a limitation to what can be accomplished. Deliberative Polling, whether on-line or face to face, involves only a random sample of the population. The thoughtful and informed views created in the experiment are not widely shared because the bulk of the public is still, in all likelihood, disengaged and inattentive because it is subject to the incentives for rational ignorance that routinely apply to citizens in the large scale nation state. Deliberative Polling overcomes those incentives for a microcosm, but leaves the rest of the population largely untouched (we say largely since the rest of the population may well witness the process through the media).

The last two categories, 4A and 4B, parallel the previous ones, except that when ideally realized, they would offer the full embodiment of the kind of result represented by scientific sampling in 3A and 3B. If everyone somehow participated in mass consultations such as voting or referendum democracy, then 4A would represent the same views as those offered by public opinion polls in 3A. Of course, one problem with referendum democracy and other forms of mass consultation that attempt to involve the bulk of the mass public, is that turnout is often so defective that only a portion of the public participates. Sometimes the participation in referendums or national elections is so low, in fact, that the distinction between mass plebescitary democracy and self-selected samples in SLOPs becomes difficult to draw. Of course, there are possible institutional remedies for low turnout. Australia has a long tradition of compulsory voting, fining non-voters, that has worked quite well to provide one of the highest turnouts in the world in national elections. However, it is well established that compulsory voting has done little or nothing to improve the level of knowledge or engagement among voters, just the level of participation.

The last possibility, 4B, is the most ambitious. Just as conventional polling (3A) models actual top of the head opinion in the mass public, which is represented by plebescitary democracy (4A) in our scheme, in the same way, Deliberative Polling 3B, models mass deliberative public opinion 4B. The latter, however, is usually counterfactual. The mass public, in other words, is usually not deliberating; it usually does not have considered judgments on most policy issues. How could this counterfactual possibility be realized? How could it be realized in either a face to face context or on line?

Bruce Ackerman and I have a proposal. We call it "Deliberation Day" ([Ack-](#)

erman & Fishkin, 2004). The problem for the Deliberative Poll was to motivate a microcosm of the entire population to overcome the incentives for rational ignorance and to engage in enough substantive face to face discussion to arrive at informed judgments—informed about the issues and the main competing arguments about them that other citizens would offer. But it is one thing to imagine doing this for a microcosm; quite another to imagine doing it for the entire population. Gallup's vision was that the combination of the media and polling could turn the entire country into "one great room." The media would send out competing views and the polls would report the public's judgments and it would be as if the entire country were in one town meeting. (For a summary of this original vision and an argument that it is better achieved by the Deliberative Poll, see Fishkin, 1997, pp. 76–80 and 161–176.) This vision foundered, however, on the lack of a social context that would encourage small group deliberation. If everyone is one great room in the large scale nation state, the room is so big that no one is listening. A different, more decentralized strategy is required.

We propose a national holiday in which all voters would be invited to participate in local, randomly assigned discussion groups as a preparation to the voting process a week later. Candidates for the major parties would make presentations transmitted by national media and local small group discussions would identify key questions that would be directed to local party representatives in relatively small scale town meetings held simultaneously all over the country. Incentives would be paid for each citizen to participate. The cost, while massive, would make democracy far more meaningful as it would provide for an input from the public that involved most people and that also led to a large mass of citizens informed on the issues and the competing arguments. If the incentives for participation in this national holiday activity, "Deliberation Day", worked and people actually became well informed, it would make real the counterfactual deliberative opinion represented by the quasi-experiment of the Deliberative Poll. Candidate behavior and advertising would have to adjust to the fact that voters would have become informed on the issues. The anticipation of such a deliberative public could do a great deal to transform the rest of the public dialogue.

While full scale realization of this idea is only a far off possibility, it is meant to dramatize a different way of thinking about democratic reform. The major cost of the reform is the new holiday. We propose to take an existing holiday, Presidents Day and devote it to picking our next president. We have actually piloted the idea in this 2004 Presidential Election. In 17 cities, locally televised Deliberative Polls were conducted, mostly on the same day, with statistical microcosms that represented what the local publics would think if they were all deliberating. In many cases these local deliberations produced significant knowledge gains and changes of opinion. The local/national project also dramatized the value of putting a human face on opinion change to enrich political communication as well as the prospects for creating civic engagement through discussion in local communities around the country.

There are two categories in our scheme that achieve both inclusion and

deliberation—3B and 4B—Deliberative Polling and Deliberation Day. Deliberative Polling achieves inclusiveness through a form of political equality—everyone has an equal chance of being selected through random sampling. The latter achieves inclusiveness through mass participation. Ideally, everyone does actually participate. In both cases, an important new increment of thoughtfulness is added by the deliberative process itself—briefing materials, small group discussions, questions and answers from competing experts, opportunities to reflect together on new information and competing arguments in a safe public space. Both strategies—Deliberative Polling and Deliberation Day—combine inclusiveness and greater thoughtfulness. Both are meant to be antidotes to shrinking sound bite democracy and disaffected mass participation. Both are realizations of the same pattern of deliberative practice—small group discussions alternated with plenary sessions with competing experts. The difference is whether this kind of experience is undertaken by scientific samples or by something approaching the entire mass public. The former achieves inclusiveness via scientific sampling; the latter achieves it via mass participation.

Only two of the possibilities in our original chart offer reliable prospects for avoiding the list of distortions with which we started. Deliberative Polling can overcome the distortions of opinion from the lack of information, misinformation, strategically incomplete information and manipulation, assuming that the deliberative process is achieved with a high degree of balance, good information and sincere participation. What is true for a microcosm could in principle be true for the entire population if a comparable process were experienced by it. Hence Deliberative Polling offers a picture of what Deliberation Day might look like if it were ever realized. Similarly, Deliberative Polling can overcome the dangers of self selection and capture, since, when properly realized, its participants are a scientific, random sample. The process engages many people who would not normally put themselves forward. It is not open to capture by self selected groups since only those recruited in the original random sample can participate. Similarly, a full scale realization of Deliberation Day would not be open to capture since organized groups could not swamp the mass participation of the entire society. It is for this reason that Deliberation Day requires a significant incentive to encourage everyone to participate.

Given the expense and ambition of Deliberation Day, Deliberative Polling represents the most immediate practical strategy for public consultation that realizes inclusion and thoughtfulness and avoids the distortions often encountered by other methods.

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