

of competing events. The answer to the problems of American democracy is more democracy—including more pluralistic give-and-take, and more *unrepresentative* forums around this vast and diverse land. It will not come through highly artificial events like the Austin 600 masquerading as an exemplar of purer democratic life.

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The Deliberative Poll: A Reply to Our Critics

By James S. Fishkin and Robert C. Luskin

Innovations are often seen as interferences with the existing way of doing things. The (non-deliberative) public opinion poll itself is an example. Theodore Lowi has brought to our attention the fact that early efforts to assess public opinion prior to the presidential elections of 1892 and 1896 stimulated a letter in an Indianapolis newspaper that described "polling the voters before the election" as "an infamous, contemptible

conspiracy in this glorious, free republic." A certain portion of the commentary in this symposium has a similar defensive flavor, contrasting deliberative polling unfavorably with "the regular processes of democratic life" (see Ladd, p. 44).

The remaining criticisms are more particular. The deliberative poll is a complex innovation: a research program coupled with a television program

coupled with an informal democratic institution. Uniquely, it aims to be both representative and deliberative. A national probability sample is briefed, set to thinking, and then brought together to discuss a set of policy issues. Ordinary polls are representative but not deliberative. Self-selected citizen discussion groups like the National Issues Forums are deliberative but not representative. The deliberative poll aims to be both. Correspondingly, most of the criticisms can be sorted into attacks on the quality of the representation or the quality of the deliberation. There are also more purely methodological attacks on the measurement of change.

The Deliberative Poll

The Value of Deliberative Polling

Misconstructions, in these criticisms, are rife, and nowhere more so than on this score. Mitofsky, for example, seems to think we are trying to capture the effects of an election campaign. Thus he says, "No matter how much deliberating Fishkin's pseudo-survey participants may do..., it [the National Issues Convention (NIC)] cannot be made to mirror a campaign." We have no desire to mirror the campaign. Rather, the NIC's goal is to get a picture of what the public might think under conditions that would bring it closer to ideal citizenship than it usually comes in real-life, even at the height of the most salient election campaign.

It is correspondingly irrelevant, contrary to both Mitofsky and Tringali, that the NIC may scant or miss some campaign issues. (So, by the way, may early polls and surveys of any description. Would Mitofsky and Tringali ignore February's polls on the grounds that they might miss April's issues?) Almost inevitably, some campaign issues will receive proportionally more or less attention in the NIC than in the campaign. Conceivably the questionnaire, composed beforehand, may miss some late-emerging issue completely. So what? Our aim is simply to gauge informed opinions on prominent issues, which needn't precisely match those of the campaign.

Nor is it true, as several of the critics seem to be arguing, that the NIC figures to be inferior to election campaigns for gauging the opinions of a highly inter-

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ested, thoughtful, and informed electorate. Campaigns do occasion some political deliberation (and the intervals between them, for that matter, are not void of it). To varying degrees, people pick up political information, think about politics, and talk about it. To varying degrees, they learn about the candidates and their ideological orientations or issue positions. But these information gains are generally quite modest and do not much extend to the issues themselves—to the alternatives for government action or inaction and their likely ramifications. Thus even during and just after presidential campaigns, most people show remarkable lack of knowledge about politics. This is not "elitism" but realism—and the consensus of political scientists studying public opinion (see Converse, 1964, 1970; Kinder and Sears, 1985; Luskin, 1987, 1996; Zaller, 1992; Bennett, 1989; Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1991).

To be clear, it is not just civics book details of the "how many years is a Senator's term" variety that are lacking. (In fact, though, these too may sometimes be important. A large proportion of Tom Foley's constituents, during his 1994 reelection campaign, thought the district would retain the Speakership, regardless of who won.) Major chunks of information critical to comprehending the stakes and arguments in policy debates are mostly absent. Converse (1970) cites the example of majorities in 1961 in favor of knocking down the then newly constructed Berlin Wall but not knowing that Berlin was surrounded by Communist East Germany. One could go on at length in this vein, but perhaps the most telling pattern is this: It is hard to imagine anything more essential to good citizenship—in the minimum sense of choosing sensibly by one's own lights—than knowing, at least relatively speaking, where the two major parties stand on the issues of the day. Someone who thinks, for example, that the Democratic party is more in favor of reducing federal regulation of the economy has got things quite wrong and may consequently make voting or other political choices quite at odds with his/her interests as s/he sees them. Yet roughly half

the sample—about the proportion that might be expected from random guessing—generally admits to having no idea where the parties stand or places them incorrectly (Luskin, 1987, 1996).

No doubt the fault lies partly with the media. Campaign coverage in the truly mass media (as distinct from more specialized outlets like *The New Republic* or *The National Review*) is heavily focused on the horse race and issues of style and character, not policy. When policy issues do surface, they are typically mounted in a horse race frame (see Patterson, 1993). Quite possibly the fault lies partly with our schools, which acquaint students with only the denatured politics of civics lessons. But a good deal of the fault, to the extent that it really is a question of fault, lies with us. To varying degrees, people are "rationally ignorant": keeping up with politics looks unimportant compared to other, more pressing concerns. Notably for our purposes, however, this rational ignorance rests partly on positive feedback mechanisms. People don't learn more about politics because they don't grasp the stakes, to do which they would have to know more. The NIC is a way of breaking into this cycle by lifting people out of their actual, everyday lives.

Contrary to Ladd and Tringali, this can be expected to matter. Their view seems Panglossian—even the averagely ignorant citizen manages to cope. Says Ladd, "ordinary citizens, even if not possessing detailed and expert information, can, nonetheless, know their own interests and values and from them intelligently, rationally set the polity's direction." People do not always know their own interests. Often they adopt policy preferences that don't suit their interests. Often they have plainly mistaken notions about where the parties or candidates stand on the issues. Often they consequently cast votes that do not reflect their interests. And those most prone to make these sorts of errors are those with the meagerest information.

None of this, contrary to Newport (pp. 7-9), is to snub the distribution of public opinion as it is. The shape of

actual public opinion is extremely important, as are the polls that measure it. We do consider, however, the people may learn more about policy issues and that, when they do, their opinions may change. The NIC is a way of testing this proposition empirically.

Finally, there is the question of persistence. Mitofsky doubts that any NIC-induced changes will last until election day. Almost certainly they will have decayed. Once back in old milieu and routines, our participants may fall back into old habits and under the sway of old incentives and thus regress back toward pre-event levels of interest and information and pre-event policy positions. For our part, we doubt that the NIC-induced changes will have completely disappeared, but that is an empirical question we shall be in a position to address. Thanks to support from the Pew Charitable Trusts, we shall be reinterviewing the NIC participants at later points in the campaign season. In the British case, we have reinterviewed participants nine months later and discovered considerable persistence for the considered judgments. Even if the decay were complete, however, the case for the NIC would be unaffected. It is to be expected that ordinary citizens, returned from the special experience and incentives of the NIC, will in some measure return to being ordinary citizens. What matters to the NIC is the glimpse of their opinions when they are led, even transitorily, to become more involved in and informed about politics than before.

The Quality of Representation

One legitimate concern is the "participation rate": the proportion of the original sample who show up in Austin. Mitofsky predicts this will be low, but we refer the reader to Bradburn (pp.9-11). NORC has mounted a systematic effort to interview as many as possible of the original sample and to recruit as many as possible of the interviewees to attend the NIC. A great deal of money, time, and effort are going into the process of making sure that there are no barriers to anyone's participation. We are already replete with examples of

handicapped persons, the aged, those with various child-care responsibilities, who are making a great effort to come to Austin. Television and the excitement of the event turn out to be strong attractors, regardless of previous political interest, as does the idea that one's voice will matter.

The result is that Mitofsky's projections look considerably too pessimistic. The indications are that the American project will achieve a much higher participation rate than the British ones did. NORC completes interviews with roughly 80% of its GSS samples, and so far 75% of those interviewed are agree-

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ing to come to Austin. We cannot know the actual participation rate until the weekend of January 18-21, but reducing the recruitment rate from 75 to 65% would still yield a projected participation rate of roughly $.8 \times .65 = .52$ (52%)—not so far below the interview rates of most telephone surveys, properly calculated.

In any case, the participation rate per se is not the most important concern. More important is the degree to which those who turn up look like the whole sample. According to Tringali, they cannot possibly be representative. But the data from the British deliberative polls do not support him. The first

British event, on the topic of crime, was broadcast by Channel 4 in May 1994. The 300 participants could not generally be distinguished, attitudinally or demographically, from the 869 originally interviewed. The latter were 74% of the original sample and matched up well with census data. Those participating in the weekend were no more interested in politics, no more interested in the issue of crime, no different in political attitude or party affiliation, no more likely to read newspapers (and no different in which newspapers they read), than those who did not come. The second British event showed only a few small differences. For more on this general issue we refer the reader to Converse (pp. 11-14).

The Quality of the Deliberation

A number of critics object to the NIC's artificiality. It is admittedly not quite like anything likely to be experienced even by the hypothetically more interested, thoughtful, and informed citizens whose opinions we are aiming to measure. Even they are unlikely to be taking weekends off to discuss political issues in moderator-led small group discussions. The NIC is a strong intervention. But it needs to be, if the participants are to be moved any measurable distance in the direction of our hypothetically more engaged citizenry in such a short spell.

The utility of this strong intervention can best be illustrated with respect to the British deliberative poll on crime. As to be expected in a good national random sample, the participants included a few criminals. It was a tribute to the atmosphere of mutual respect in the small group discussions that a former "car thief" so identified himself. He added something to the discussions. He had been to prison and had some idea what it was like. He also had some idea of what motivated people to commit crimes, or at least the extent to which people he knew would have been deterred by the sense that they might be punished. Admittedly, his evidence was anecdotal, but it added a sense of reality to the discussion and, arguably, improved it.

The Deliberative Poll

Now, the members of the more engaged public we are trying to capture would still probably tend to talk to others in the same socioeconomic stratum, making the discussion just described unlikely. But they would be sufficiently avid consumers of political information to have encountered similar information in the media. The diversity of participants, though unrealistic, substitutes, in the compressed space of the deliberative poll for the richness of information sources in the hypothetical world of heavily engaged citizens. Whether or not the real world would duplicate this diversity of voices in the dialogue, the latter can be defended on normative grounds: Having interests voiced across all strata of society is closer to the kinds of discussions we would like ideal citizens to engage in as they make up their minds on important public issues.

There is also an important sense in which the intervention extends beyond—and is more naturalistic than—the weekend in Austin. Participants will know from the moment of recruitment that they will be attending a nationally televised event to talk about politics. For something like four to ten weeks before the NIC convenes, they will be reading more about politics, listening to the news more attentively, and talking more about politics with their families and friends. To facilitate this process, we are providing nonpartisan briefing materials, prepared by the Public Agenda Foundation, to map out the existing public debate on the NIC's issues. The lion's share of this anticipatory engagement, however, will probably occur on its own. In short, intervention includes the anticipation as well as the experience of the NIC, and the former possesses the naturalism the latter misses.

With regard to the briefing materials, Tringali claims that "Fishkin's goal is to survey a 'representative public' fed perfect information," then notes the unattainability of perfect information. We have never made such a claim, never imagined that anyone could devise briefings conveying anything close to perfect information. Our respondents are not in an imaginary Habermasian "ideal speech

situation" where they would have an unlimited amount of time to engage in discussion. They are preparing in a reasonable way for a long weekend. Our aim is to provide better, not perfect, information. We believe that briefing materials can be prepared that will be relatively accurate, balanced, and accessible to ordinary citizens. In much the same way Ladd, too, wants to establish an unattainable standard, then faults us for not attaining it. Yes, some issues will inevitably get left out, and no briefing is perfectly "neutral" (his term). Much the same is true of survey questions, which may also miss things and are also imperfectly neutral. But we do not think Ladd would therefore favor bringing survey research to a halt.

Again, too, the briefings are not the only source of information. The participants will have the 4-10 week interval between recruitment and convention to gather information on their own account—from newspapers, books and magazines, television, conversations, etc. They may actively seek out information. Or they may simply pay closer attention to the relevant portions of what they would be reading, watching, or hearing anyway. But they will almost certainly arrive with more new information than just what they have got from the briefing booklet.

On a related point, Ladd notes that ordinary citizens may not be the best judges of technical questions about the state of the economy. We agree. The deliberative poll is not for technical questions. Preeminently, it is for questions of collective political will—for those areas of public decision where citizens connect their values and goals to public policy. A factual background will be necessary, and we may be more or less successful at each point in providing the information that advocates of competing policy alternatives would wish to muster in support for one position or another. But the aspiration is not to turn our respondents into economists or physicists. Rather it is to facilitate the process of their turning themselves into more thoughtful and engaged citizens. The briefing materials will not be per-

fect but a great deal of effort will have been spent to make them an accessible and engaging source of better information than respondents might have otherwise.

Another concern about the "artificiality" of the experience, raised by Ladd and Adair, is the possibility of a Hawthorne effect. We should be so lucky. The classic Hawthorne experiments involved workers who became more efficient or productive workers, as a result merely of the fact that they knew they were being observed. In the same way, our participants, to the extent they are keenly aware of being studied, should learn all the more about and become all the more interested in politics. As for the effects of being on camera (Ladd, pp. 43), not all groups will be televised, and it will be easy to compare the ones that are with the remainder that aren't.

Adair goes on to discuss demand characteristics, but these too should be unproblematic. In the typical social psychology experiment, the true purpose is hidden. Subjects, sensing that they have not been told the true purpose, try to divine it and to behave accordingly. In contrast, we have no secrets about our purposes. We want the participants to learn, think, and talk about politics. They know that. If they try to oblige us, so much the better. We want to establish expectations that citizens in this experiment are to behave more like ideal citizens, considering the arguments on their merits in a deliberative atmosphere. If citizens are aware of these expectations, it serves the purpose of the experiment.

But what of the possibility confounding small group dynamics mentioned by Ladd and Tindale? As Tindale himself admits, the great bulk of research he is citing does not really apply to the small group discussions of the NIC. It is not just, as he notes, that there is no task to be performed beyond the exchange of views. It is also, more importantly, that these are MODERATED groups. As veterans of the National Issues Forums, the moderators will bring great experience and skill to

the task of encouraging a thoughtful atmosphere where everyone's views get a respectful hearing. They will try to ensure that all sides of an issue get aired and that all members of the group make some contribution to the discussion. Inevitably, some participants will still be more vocal than others. But this is surely a realistic feature of the hypothetical as well as the actual public: not everyone, even when thoroughly engaged, is equally voluble.

It is also worth reiterating that the NIC participants will already have spent some 4-10 weeks of anticipatory learning, thinking and talking about the issues, another major respect in which the NIC will depart from the usual small group experiment. Arriving with much better formed (and informed) views than the subjects in the usual small group experiment, they should be less susceptible to pressures toward conformity.

Of course it remains eminently plausible that some purely social dynamic could account for some portion of the opinion change we see (or partly obscure some information-driven change in the opposite direction). Members of relatively homogeneous groups may move toward the group's modal position; members of relatively heterogeneous ones may diverge further. But all this will be easy to sort out empirically. Controlling for the means, variances, etc. of the other group members' positions will enable us to estimate what portion of the observed changes are information-driven.

The Measurement of Change

Both Mitofsky and Ladd criticize the NIC for the absence of a control group to parcel out the observed changes in opinion, information, etc., deriving from the NIC versus the campaign and other surrounding events (what Campbell and Stanley, 1963, call "history"). We have long had this as one of our goals and are working toward plans to conduct a separate telephone survey of a national probability (RDD) sample coincident with the NIC. In modesty, given the difference in modality from

the NIC's self-administered questionnaire, we claim only quasi-experimental status for this strategy, but this puts us right on the border of a true (if field) experiment, of the classic "post-test-only control group" design (Campbell and Stanley, 1963). In addition, we have data on those original interviewees who chose not to come. These are not formally a random subsample, of course, but our British experience suggests that they may not originally differ much in any material way from those who do come. In a more clearly quasi-experimental way, therefore, the pre-event interviews with this nonparticipant sample enable us to approximate a superior version of the "pre-test/post-test control group design" (Campbell and Stanley, 1963), with separate pre- and post-test control groups.

Is the NIC (or something like it) necessary to gauge the changes in policy preferences that result from increased information, etc.? We think so. As Newport notes, the consequences of greater or lesser information can be assessed with ordinary surveys. The survey analyst contrasts people holding more or less information, holding other characteristics constant statistically, and hopes but cannot really know that this contrast is what one would see if an uninformed individual actually increased his political information by the same amount. It may be added, by the way, that the upshot of such analyses is that information matters, that citizens do not necessarily "know their interests" (Bartels, 1996).

A good many of the criticisms above are empirical matters, which the NIC will provide the data to address. Let us get the data and see.

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