

DELIBERATIVE POLLING 101

WHAT?

Deliberative Polling is a unique form of political consultation that combines techniques of public opinion research and public deliberation to construct hypothetical representations of what public opinion on a particular issue might look like if citizens were given a chance to become more informed. As a polling method, the Deliberative Poll seeks to account for the preferences and opinions of citizens both before and after they have had an opportunity to arrive at considered judgements based on information and exposure to the views of fellow citizens

WHY?

Citizens are often uninformed about key public issues. Conventional polls represent the public's surface impressions of sound bites and headlines. The public, subject to what social scientists have called "rational ignorance," has little reason to confront trade-offs or invest time and effort in acquiring information or coming to a considered judgment. Deliberative Polling® is an attempt to use public opinion research in a new and constructive way. It is especially suitable for issues where the public may have little knowledge or information, or where the public may have failed to confront the trade-offs applying to public policy. It is a social science experiment and a form of public education in the broadest sense.. The process has the statistical representativeness of a scientific sample but it also has the concreteness and immediacy of a focus group or a discussion group

How?

Generally speaking, the process of conducting a Deliberative Poll, including the proceedings on the day(s) of deliberation, can be broken down into a five-step process¹:

1. A random, representative sample of the public is contacted and asked to provide feedback on an initial questionnaire aimed at evaluating the knowledge, perceptions, and preferences of the general public on a specific question.
2. Another random representative sample of citizens are contacted and asked to participate in a 'deliberative event' to be held over the course of one or two days.
3. In the lead up to the event, selected participants receive balanced briefing materials vetted by a panel of experts pertaining to the topics to be discussed.
4. On the day of the deliberative event participants are randomly assigned to small groups with trained moderators. During the group-sessions, the participants are encouraged to develop questions to pose a panel of experts and policymakers at a plenary session held towards the end of the event.
5. The event concludes with all participants filling out a second questionnaire intended to capture their considered opinions on the topic at hand. The results of the first poll are compared to the final poll, and any changes in opinion are measured and analyzed by trained pollsters. In most cases, the findings of the final survey are disseminated to the public through media coverage and, in some cases, form the basis of further debate and deliberations by politicians and policy-makers.

¹ See http://participedia.net/en/methods/deliberative-polling#cite_note-nineteen-18

APPLICATION OF THE METHOD IN THE PROJECT

The National EU debate will be conducted on the central level, including all eight planning regions from Macedonia, as the sample which will be subject to our analysis through assessment of the public opinion is a representative one for the country. The target groups are the wider public, the experts and the civil society organizations which work on issues related to the EU integration of Macedonia.

Involved stakeholders:

- 130 citizens which will comprise the sample for the deliberative polling;
- At least thirty experts working on EU topics
- Five to eight civil society organizations which will participate in the focus groups and as discussants during the deliberative poll.