

BECAUSE POLITICAL KNOWLEDGE MATTERS: THE IMPACT OF DELIBERATION ON YOUNG CITIZENS' OPINIONS

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PRETHODNO PRIOPČENJE / DOI: 10.20901/ms.7.14.7 / PRIMLJENO: 07.03.2016.

ABSTRACT *This paper addresses the importance of “knowledge” and “access to information” in the formation of young citizens’ opinion through deliberative procedures. The research presented in this paper is grounded in the theoretical framework of deliberative democracy as a democratic model and procedure that allows participants to be engaged in a rational and open dialogue before deciding on a particular issue. Our research draws empirically upon a deliberative event that took place in October 2014 at the Western Macedonia University of Applied Sciences in Greece. The topic of deliberation was “Political Public Opinion Polls.” The results of this study are commensurate with the dominant thesis in the relevant literature, which underlines that the deliberative procedure enriches the knowledge of citizens and thus enables them to participate effectively in the decision making process.*

KEYWORDS

DELIBERATION, PUBLIC OPINION POLLS, DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY, KNOWLEDGE,
POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

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This research project has been co-financed by the European Union (European Social Fund – ESF) and Greek national funds through the Operational Program “Education and Lifelong Learning” of the National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF) – Research Funding Program: ARCHIMEDES III. Investing in the knowledge society through the European Social Fund.

INTRODUCTION

In modern representative democracies one of the topical key questions refers to the strengthening of peoples' power in democratic procedures. Academic studies underline the shortcomings of current democratic procedures and governance systems, while analysing possible ways to reinforce citizens' involvement in politics and henceforth move towards more participative models of democracy (see for example different aspects of this discussion in Barber, 2004; Torfing and Triantafillou, 2011: 169-277).

One of the components of effective political participation is political knowledge as it is crucial for citizens ability to shape informed opinions. Political knowledge matters for an additional reason. Any decision that may result from a procedure in which a participant is exposed to a plurality of well supported arguments, such as those contained in a deliberative procedure, will probably be more balanced and well justified.

For the purpose of testing the role of knowledge in the formation of citizens' opinions we have conducted a face-to-face deliberative study for the controversial political topic: "Political Public Opinion Polls" (henceforth PPOP). This topic was chosen among others because: a) PPOP's appearance in media outlets constitute for citizens a significant source of information for political issues; b) PPOP are not only a tool for "measuring" public opinion trends, but they may as well shape public opinion; c) The number of PPOP and their importance in political life increases during election periods as pollsters strive to forecast the electoral preferences of voters. The increased number of elections in Greece in the last years, coupled with several failed attempts of pollsters to accurately predict the election outcome, made PPOP a topic widely discussed in political life and raised several concerns about the credibility of the information provided by PPOP and the role of media as a conduit of circulation and dissemination. Hence there was a great likelihood that this topic would attract students attention and enhance deliberation among the participants, by raising questions to the panel and potentially causing attitudinal shifts.

The deliberative (research) event took place on October 17, 2014 with a sample of 93 students at the Western Macedonia University of Applied Sciences in Greece. The procedure consisted of a pre-deliberation and a post deliberation questionnaire (with the same questions) written material, containing balanced information on the topic of PPOP and, in the end a discussion with three experts (a politician, a professor with expertise in elections and polling, and a journalist).

Our research results provide interesting insights and evidence in relation to the impact that "increased knowledge" has on participants' attitudes and how it may cause a shift in their (pre-deliberation) opinion on several issues.

DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY AND DEMOCRATIC DIALOGUE

Deliberative democracy consists of many approaches and different strands (e.g. Dryzek, 1990; Fishkin, 2004; Benhabib, 1996; Bohman, 2000; Cohen, 1996; Gutmann and Thompson, 2003). The philosophical foundations of deliberative democracy were established by the works of Jürgen Habermas (1984, 1990, 1996, 1997) and John Rawls (1993). Deliberation theory approaches rely on common principles and values such as: the need for citizens' engagement in political procedures, the prerequisite for an open, accessible and egalitarian public sphere, the importance of a fair procedure in democratic dialogue, the significance of public reasoning for the articulation of arguments, and the absence of power relations that would threaten equality in participation. Notwithstanding a shared commitment to the above principles and values, there still exist controversies both regarding the conceptual framework and the consequences of deliberation in democratic politics (for an overview of the different interpretations of deliberation as a term see Jonsson and Astrom, 2014). Some scholars seem to pay more attention to the philosophical contestation of deliberative concepts while a significant number of scholars is concerned with the proceduralism in the analysis of deliberation (for an overview see Deligiaouri, 2011: 13-17). Doubtless, deliberative democracy has made considerable strides both conceptually and empirically (Thompson, 2008). The emerging diversity in the field is welcomed provided that sufficient care is taken to avoid conceptual confusion and "concept stretching" of the term "deliberation" (Bächtiger et al., 2010: 33).

The most profound applied deliberative theory "project" is the well-known "Deliberative polling" scheme introduced by James Fishkin (1991). Fishkin implemented basic features of deliberative theory for the purpose of conducting deliberations for a specific topic under the basic premise that enriching the knowledge of deliberators on a specific topic would have an impact on their opinion. Results illustrate that due to deliberation "opinions often change" and "the participants gain information" (Fishkin and Luskin, 2005: 290-291). The same premise informs this paper as we contend that "knowledge matters."

Democratic dialogue is one of the main cornerstones of democratic politics as citizens can exchange their views, acquire a plurality of information on a specific topic, form well justified arguments and perhaps resolve possible conflicts. Participation in public discussion may enrich participants' political knowledge, and hence it may produce a significant impact on their opinion. This impact may be either the *reinforcement* or *shift in the opposite direction* of the opinion the participant held before the deliberation. The impact depends on several factors, such as the socioeconomic status of the participants, education level, experiences and other personal factors. Recent empirical studies confirm that reactions of participants to deliberation are contingent on the varying capacities and characteristics of individuals, as "those who are older and are more knowledgeable – tend to change their minds less than those with lower levels of knowledge or who are younger" (Suiter et al., 2014: 11). In addition, procedural factors may also interfere, such as "group polarisation" which reinforces the existing attitude tendencies of participants (see Sunstein, 2003 for group polarisation in deliberations).

Presumably, the outcome of democratic deliberation, which abides by all the preconditions mentioned above, should be respected by all participants. The majoritarian rule would naturally prevail in reaching a final decision albeit respecting the opinion of the minority. Even though deliberation, especially through the lens of Habermas (1984) leads to consensus, it is likely that disagreements will arise and hence in the end a successful resolution should accommodate all these conflicts in the best possible way. A basic disagreement is nonetheless essential in the deliberative process as the exposure to opposing views may inform the opinion of the participants and strengthen or question their previous views (Thompson, 2008: 502).

Deliberation is highly associated with the ability of citizens to form well-justified opinions. Studies in the field demonstrate that deliberative procedures increase the level of knowledge and "civic virtues" of the citizens (Gronlund et al., 2010). Deliberation is also associated with significant changes in citizens' opinion and sometimes with vote switching either in favour of a political party or against it (see Bernhagen and Schmitt, 2014). In relation to young participants – as in the case of our research – Jane Suiter et al., observe that "younger people and those with less initial knowledge are more likely to change their views on salient issues" (2014: 11).

POLITICAL PUBLIC OPINION POLLS, MEDIA AND THE FORMATION OF PUBLIC OPINION

Public participation in decision making is essential in democratic politics. Consequently, it is important for citizens to have access to the relevant information and to be provided with all the answers they need in order to form a well-justified opinion. To fulfil this requirement, pluralism of opinions and multiple sources of information constitute essential preconditions in ensuring impartiality, objectivity and transparency in the final decision making.

People tend to derive political information mainly from the media and according to long-standing communication theories people are usually inclined to follow the dominant opinion presented in the media (Noelle-Neumann, 1974). It is important to consider that "the information provided by the media can be fundamental for citizens' understanding and analysis of political issues" (Fraile, 2013: 123). Public opinion research identifies the so called "bandwagon effect" broadly conceived as the tendency of people to modify their opinions in order to conform to what the majority believes (Ragozinno and Hartman, 2014; Hardmeier, 2008), an "effect" which seems to favour the leading party in attracting voters on its side. On the other hand, a number of studies refer to the opposite "underdog" effect (Bhatti and Pedersen, 2016: 137) which amounts to the shift of opinions in favour of parties that are underperforming in polls.

The influential character of PPOP increases during electoral periods as people tend to be more interested in politics and search for more information about contestable issues in politics. PPOP are widely considered a methodological tool – especially during electoral

periods – for the purpose of sketching public opinion trends and tendencies regarding political parties, politicians and other topics of political interest. They supposedly reflect citizens' preferences on a particular topic and provide an overview of the fluctuations of opinions in specific time intervals. Thus, they can lead to reasonable estimations of public sentiment on several issues and the voting preferences of citizens. In a sense, PPOP depict an instant snapshot or representation of public opinion at a time. Adam Berinsky (1999) raises concerns about the ways public opinion polls aggregate public opinion, as they may "poorly reflect collective public sentiment" (1999: 1210) and hence provide an inaccurate aggregative result of public opinion. This is due, he argues, (Berinsky, 1999) to the fact that some respondents are hesitant to express a divergent view from the dominant one.

PPOP are indeed a tool for the "measurement" and "reflection" of public opinion trends. However, they can similarly be instruments of influence on public opinion as "people regularly learn about the views of the majority via public opinion polling" (Rothschild and Malhotra, 2014: 1). Several factors are critical for how and at which level the influence of public opinion may occur, e.g., the time of the publication of PPOP, the methodology followed, and how the media report and present them.

PPOP reach the audience through media and consequently the way the medium presents them remains crucial on how audiences perceive the results of a PPOP. As Michael Ragozinno and Todd Hartmann conclude "the media's use of public opinion polls can shift individuals' policy preferences" (2014: 11). The academic literature underlines several aspects and consequences of how media portray public opinion through PPOP. These aspects may refer to the effect of published polls on the attitudes and behaviour of the audience, political parties' strategies and several related issues (Holtz-Bacha and Strömbäck, 2012). Therefore it is evident that media do not function only as outlets for the publication of PPOP, but they have the potential to shape public opinion *by the manner* in which they report and frame their results. Several concerns are raised regarding the journalistic interpretation of poll results in terms of accuracy and statistical significance. As Yosef Bhatti and Rasmus Pedersen argue "a large share of the interpretations made by the journalists is based on differences in numbers that are so small that they are most likely just statistical noise" (2016: 136).

The role of PPOP in democratic politics, as well as issues of validity and accuracy, especially in the context of election polls, always constitute a current topic of discussion in the literature (see Donsbach, 2016). Sunshine Hillygus (2011) mentions three functions of public opinion polls in US election politics, which may as well apply to any country: forecasting election outcomes, understanding voter behaviour, and planning campaign strategy. Some scholars – mainly echoing the pollsters' viewpoint – present PPOP as means of providing additional, useful information with the aid of scientific methods for the purpose of enriching citizens' knowledge before they reach their final decision (for an earlier discussion on these topics, see Converse, 1987; Yeric and Todd, 1989; Crespi, 1989). A noticeable number of scholars on the other hand, maintain a critical stance towards the validity and accuracy of PPOP or their intended outcome, which in some cases is not considered to be the enrichment of citizens' informational resources (Bourdieu, 1979;

Jacobs and Shapiro, 1995; Champagne, 2004; an overview of both arguments can be found in Ragozinno and Hartman, 2014: 3-5).

Based on the preceding discussion, several questions and concerns are raised regarding the role of PPOP in political life. Our research will try to shed light on a) how citizens respond to these questions and b) if their opinion changes after they acquire more information pertaining to the discussion about PPOP.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

We expect that deliberation has an impact on citizens' attitudes. Specifically, this study will examine the effects of deliberation in terms of:

- (a) direction (i.e., reinforcement or opposite shift), and
- (b) valence (i.e., "positive" or "negative") of significant changes on citizens' attitudes.

The "positive" valence signifies a positive attitude for the role/reliability of PPOP in democratic procedures and in the formation of public opinion.

The "negative" valence signifies a negative attitude for the role/reliability of PPOP in democratic procedures and in the formation of public opinion.

METHODOLOGY¹

Deliberation topic and experts

The subject of the deliberative poll was "Political Public Opinion Polls." This subject matter included five main areas for discussion: (1) reliability-accuracy of opinion polls; (2) data manipulation of public opinion polls by media organisations, pollsters and politicians; (3) use of public opinion polls by politicians in the decision making process; (4) impact of polls on political participation, and (5) impact of polls on voting behaviour. The deliberation topic was chosen bearing in mind that the participants were students.

As previously noted, the three experts were carefully chosen and comprised of a well-known politician, a well-reputed expert and pollster, and a renowned journalist.

Procedure

In order to achieve the objectives of the present study a real deliberative event was conducted on October 17, 2014, at the auditorium of the Western Macedonia University of Applied Sciences in Kastoria, Greece. The discussants were 93 students who volunteered to participate in the deliberation.

¹ This paper is part of a larger research project. A similar methodological framework was used in conducting an online deliberation on the same topic using the same questionnaire for the purpose of comparative analysis between online and offline deliberation (see Triantafyllidou et al., 2015a and Triantafyllidou et al., 2015b).

Participants were informed at the beginning about the purpose of this deliberative event. On the first page of the questionnaires (which were anonymous) the first two paragraphs explained the context of the research project in which the deliberative event was included, and assured participants of the anonymity of the data and the use of the returned questionnaires solely for the purposes of the current academic research. In this way, the consent of the student participants was secured for the whole procedure.

Upon arrival, students completed an initial (pre-deliberation) questionnaire based on their bare knowledge on the topic without being provided any further information. Then, the students were given a 19-page written report which organised information around the issues under deliberation into pro and con arguments, thus presenting a two-sided view of the issues in a balanced manner.

At the next stage the three experts presented their opinions, engaged in a dialogue with the other panellists, and responded to the questions posed by participants. Discussion was supervised by a moderator whose responsibility was to (a) make sure that the discussion proceeds in an orderly fashion; (b) address and guide the panelists; (c) encourage audience participation, and (d) keep the discussion focused within specified time limits. In this way we wanted to minimise the influence of the moderator on the outcome of deliberation. The presentation of the arguments by the experts fuelled the interest of students regarding the role of PPOP considering the many questions that were addressed to the panel, and the lively discussion that ensued.

At the last stage of the research, which took place after the conclusion of the discussion, the students answered the post deliberation questionnaire.

We should point out that our methodology departed significantly from Fishkin's "Deliberative polls" in the following ways: a) the sample was not divided into small groups and hence all discussions were held in a plenary session and no small group discussions took place; b) the role of the moderator was limited in just coordinating the procedure; c) the sample comprised of students only and therefore it was not a representative sample.

Questionnaire and measurement of opinions

Students were provided a pre and a post deliberation questionnaire, which was divided into 7 sections. Section 1, consisted of 3 questions aimed to examine the familiarisation of participants' with PPOP. Section 7, consisted of 7 questions requesting general and demographic information of the participants. Sections 2-6 represented the main body of our research. These sections included in total 31 questions that measure the attitudes of participants around the five main thematic categories about polls. For the purpose of including in the questionnaire questions that were the most proper and relevant to the political agenda we previously conducted an extensive study on the basic characteristics of PPOP, and assembled the major arguments in favour or against their role in democratic politics in a written report given to the students, as stated above.

More specifically, the first thematic category included questions that measured participants' attitudes about the reliability – accuracy of opinion polls (see Table 1); the second category included questions referring to issues of data manipulation in public opinion polls by media organisations, pollsters and politicians; the third thematic category examined issues related to the use of public opinion polls by politicians for decision making; the fourth category measured the impact of polls on political participation and the fifth category examined the impact of polls on the voting behaviour of citizens.

Responses to all questions were elicited through five-item Likert scales ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Five-item Likert scales were chosen with a neutral middle point instead of four or six point scales in order to avoid "forcing" the participant to take a specific position (i.e., agree or disagree) prior or after the deliberation, thus influencing the outcome (changes in attitudes) of deliberation.

In order to compare pre-deliberation and after-deliberation results paired-samples t-tests were conducted.

DISCUSSION/RESULTS

The effects of deliberation

The sample was 69.9% female and was 30.1% male, while the majority of the students were seniors (78.5%). In addition, 86.2% of the respondents, as they stated, spent less than one hour a day reading newspaper or online articles about politics and watching political television programs. Using independent t-tests we checked the differences between pre and post-deliberation mean attitudes of students in order to examine the effects of deliberation on citizens' opinions regarding polls. The results of the tests are presented in Table 1. Moreover, the standard deviations prior to and after the deliberative event are reported in order to better interpret the changes in attitudes and determine whether deliberation resulted in greater diversity or consensus among participants.

As Table 1 demonstrates, deliberation affected a number of attitudes. Overall, seven out of 31 attitude statements exhibited statistically significant changes.

In regards to participants' opinions about the *accuracy and reliability of opinion polls* respondents after the deliberation session were significantly more likely to agree than before (exhibiting a higher mean value after deliberation) that "a sample of 1000-1500 people can accurately represent the universe of potential voters." This difference found in the above statement was small, indicating deliberation reinforced slightly, but significantly, participants' opinion regarding the representativeness of opinion polls.

Table 1. Effects of deliberation

	Pre Deliberation		Post Deliberation		T-Statistic	Significance of the T-test
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation		
Reliability-accuracy of opinion polls						
In general, the process of polling as conducted in Greece is reliable	2.88	0.80	2.83	0.81	0.542	0.589
Polls always produce reliable results	2.44	0.82	2.38	0.79	0.560	0.577
<i>A sample of 1000-1500 people can accurately represent the universe of potential voters</i>	2.20	0.95	2.49	0.98	-2.753	0.007*
Polls are an accurate snapshot of public opinions at a particular point in time	3.18	0.98	3.15	0.99	0.276	0.783
Answers given by respondents in polls reflect their true beliefs	2.38	0.93	2.19	0.85	1.719	0.089
Respondents will give their answers based on what they believe is the most socially acceptable/favourable or the most popular, rather than their true opinions	3.19	0.98	3.08	0.867	0.920	0.360
Respondents have the particular knowledge required to answer the questions of opinion polls	2.56	0.82	2.64	0.82	-0.776	0.440
Data manipulation of public opinion polls by media organizations, pollsters and politicians						
<i>Media organizations, most of the time, fairly present and publish the results of opinion polls</i>	2.83	0.86	2.60	0.86	2.497	0.014*
Media organizations manipulate and selectively publish the results of opinion polls in order to satisfy the interests of their sponsors	3.66	0.79	3.61	0.87	0.540	0.590
Media organizations manipulate and selectively publish the results of opinion polls in order to exert influence on public opinion	3.72	0.85	3.69	0.79	0.235	0.815
Many polling organizations selectively report opinion poll results in order to influence public opinion in a certain direction	3.66	0.78	3.79	0.79	-1.365	0.176

When the clients of opinion polls are either parties or politicians, then the chances of reporting results which favour them are increased	3.76	0.85	3.69	0.81	0.726	0.470
The results of opinion polls are manipulated by the political offices of parties or candidates in order to influence public opinion	3.49	0.81	3.52	0.77	-0.336	0.738
Polls reported often conceal the real opinion of respondents	3.23	0.95	3.43	0.80	-1.751	0.083
Use of public opinion polls by politicians for decision making						
Politicians need surveys to pursue the right policies	3.50	0.93	3.39	0.82	1.043	0.300
<i>Politicians and political parties use public opinion polls to assist them in the development of their election campaign strategies</i>	3.90	0.69	3.51	0.70	4.340	0.000*
<i>Election campaigns are dominated by public opinion polls</i>	3.75	0.84	3.37	0.85	3.556	0.001*
Politicians use polls to specify the top issues which concern the electorate and set their political agendas	3.49	0.87	3.42	0.76	0.617	0.539
Politicians use polls to persuade the public for or against a certain political position	3.80	0.85	3.59	0.81	1.973	0.052
Politicians use polls to make the right political decisions	2.63	0.89	2.74	0.85	0.971	0.334
Politicians use polls as a source of accurate information about the expectations and preferences of the electorate	3.18	0.94	3.00	0.88	1.495	0.138
Impact of polls on political participation						
Polls provide a way for citizens to stay informed about the top political issues and the opinions of the public towards them	3.55	0.75	3.37	0.87	1.804	0.075
<i>Opinion polls facilitate a better communication between citizens and politicians</i>	3.04	0.83	2.84	0.85	2.195	0.031*
<i>Opinion polls serve as a communication channel between citizens and government and an indirect form of public participation</i>	3.22	0.91	3.02	0.88	2.273	0.025*



Polls create a more democratic society	3.07	0.96	3.06	0.99	0.118	0.906
Through polls citizens can make their voices heard and participate in the policy making process	2.87	1.00	3.47	0.85	-1.325	0.189
Impact of polls on voting behaviour						
Results of election polls may affect the voting behaviour of the public	3.74	0.71	3.73	0.81	0.127	0.899
Polls affect undecided voters and help them vote	3.64	0.87	3.53	0.80	1.079	0.283
Polls may lead people not to vote for the party or candidate that appears to be losing the elections	3.37	0.91	3.47	0.83	-1.000	0.320
<i>Polls may lead people not to vote for the party or candidate that appears to be winning the elections</i>	3.24	0.93	3.50	0.76	-2.345	0.021*
Polls may lead people to abstain from voting since they believe that their vote will not make a difference to the election outcome	3.34	0.97	3.44	0.90	0.791	0.431

*Significant at the $p < 0.05$ level.

Questions with statistically significant mean differences prior to and after the deliberation are in italics.

As far as, participants' attitudes about *data manipulation of public opinion polls by media organizations, pollsters and politicians* are concerned, results suggest that deliberation caused small changes in one out of seven opinion statements. Respondents after the deliberation were significantly more likely to disagree than before (exhibiting lower mean values) that "media organisations, most of the time, fairly present and publish the results of opinion polls." Thus, in regards to citizens' attitudes about the media's presentation of polls, deliberation shifted – but to a small extent – citizens' attitudes in the opposite direction from their initial attitudes. Hence, after the deliberation, discussants held slightly more negative views about the mediatisation of polls.

Regarding attitude statements about *the use of public opinion polls by politicians in the decision making process*, respondents after the deliberation were significantly more likely to disagree than before (exhibiting lower mean values) that "politicians and political parties use public opinion polls to assist them in the development of their election campaign strategies" and "election campaigns are dominated by public opinion polls." Again, the significant changes found were small. Hence, deliberation somewhat changed respondents' attitudes in the opposite direction from their initial opinions about the use of polls by politicians and moderated their unfavourable opinion regarding the use of polls by politicians and parties during election campaigns.

The deliberative effect was found to be significant in the pattern of change in regards to citizens' attitudes about the *impact of polls on political participation*. Participants after the deliberation were significantly more likely to disagree than before (exhibiting lower mean values) that "opinion polls facilitate a better communication between citizens and politicians" and "opinion polls serve as a communication channel between citizens and government and an indirect form of public participation." Thus, deliberation changed marginally but significantly respondents' attitudes in the opposite direction compared to their pre-deliberation attitudes and made them hold, to some degree, more negative views about the impact of polls on citizen-government communication.

Lastly, deliberation caused minor but significant changes in students' attitudes about the *impact of polls on voting behaviour*. Specifically, respondents after the deliberation were significantly more likely to agree than before (exhibiting a higher mean value after the deliberation) that "polls may lead people to abstain from voting out of certainty that their candidate or party will win." Again, the deliberative experiment reinforced to a small level students' negative views about the de-motivating effect of polls during elections.

Looking at the standard deviations before and after the deliberation of the items in which significant changes were observed, it can be argued that most of the time deliberation marginally increased the diversity of opinions. On the other hand, minor decreases in the standard deviations after the deliberation were found in the opinions of participants about polls' (a) ability to act as a communication channel between citizens and government and an indirect form of public participation, and (b) the underdog effect (voters are influenced by polls to support a party or a candidate that seems to be losing the elections). In the above cases, deliberation was able to homogenize attitudes but only to a small degree.

Based on the preceding analysis, it can be concluded that the present deliberation has not dramatically changed participants' attitudes but rather caused minor variations in their opinions about the majority of issues on public opinion polls. Similar findings were reported by Robert Luskin et al., (2016: 19) in which deliberation "variegated rather than homogenized attitudes".

At this point we should underline that it is not clear whether the effects of the deliberation session were the result of the information material the participants received, the presentations of the experts, the discussion that followed or any other factor. The role of experts and how they influence deliberation effects is a point of contestation. Similar studies highlight an impact related to the experts' involvement, but it is difficult to detect at which level it occurs and it is not an all-encompassing effect (Caluwaerts and Reuchamps, 2014: 20-21).

Valence (positive or negative)

Results suggest that deliberation had an effect on participants as it induced changes in their opinions either by reinforcing their existing opinion or by changing it (opposite shift). This change (direction of shifts) was either positive or negative towards the role of

PPOP. Table 2 summarizes the changes found in terms of direction and the valence of their impact on participants' attitudes towards the five statistically significant Statements/Questions of deliberation.

Table 2. Direction of attitudes' shift and valence of impact across the five deliberation topics

Participants' Attitudes About (Number of Statements/Questions)	Direction of Shifts (Number of Shifts)	Valence of Impact
Reliability-accuracy of opinion polls (7)	Reinforce ^a (1)	Positive ^c
Data manipulation of public opinion polls by media organizations, pollsters and politicians. (7)	Opposite Shift ^b (1)	Negative ^d
Use of public opinion polls by politicians in decision making process. (7)	Opposite Shift (2)	Positive
Impact of polls on political participation (5)	Opposite Shift (2)	Negative
Impact of polls on voting behaviour (5)	Reinforce (1)	Negative

a: Post-deliberation mean values > Pre-deliberation mean values

b: Post-deliberation mean values < Pre-deliberation mean values

c: Participants held more positive views of polls than prior to the deliberative event.

d: Participants held more negative views of polls than prior to the deliberative event.

Several fruitful insights derive from our findings. Deliberation caused more shifts in attitudes in the opposite direction (5) than the reinforcement of initial attitudes (2). This result indicates that in our deliberative experiment the phenomenon of group polarization found in prior deliberation studies was reduced. Moreover, even though our sample was largely homogeneous and consisted of like-minded respondents, results suggest that deliberators were exposed to competing views and a diversity of perspectives that limited the elicitation of the polarization phenomenon. Arguably, our study enhanced the exchange of different viewpoints and arguments.

Regarding the valence of the deliberative impact on attitudes, it should be noted that in 4 out of 7 attitude statements it was found to be negative. Specifically, participants held more negative views about the mediatisation of polls and the impact of polls on citizen-government communication, as well as on voting behaviour. On the contrary, a positive impact was found in 3 out of 7 attitude statements as respondents were more inclined to believe that polls are accurate and that polls are not used that much by politicians to manipulate public opinion by designing appropriate strategies during election campaigns.

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of the present study was to investigate whether an increase in the existing knowledge of citizens and deliberation had an effect on their attitudes about the several issues concerning the role of Political Public Opinion Polls in politics. Towards this end a real deliberative event was conducted. Results show that access to more information,

deliberation and exchange of information between deliberators informs their opinion, and in some cases causes a shift in their attitudes either in favour or against their existing beliefs. Although the attitudinal shifts that we found were not numerous or large in magnitude, we can establish that “knowledge matters” and has even a modest impact on citizens’ opinions.

This project contributes fresh insights to the vast and growing literature of deliberative democracy *in action*. It provides important evidence that increased knowledge really matters in the formation of citizens’ opinions and especially younger citizens, who are usually more willing to be exposed to different views. Our findings indicate that a shift in deliberators’ opinion may occur due to increased knowledge.

Our study also questions the “group polarization” effect. Our deliberation session took place among participants with a proclivity of being likeminded. However, although our sample was highly homogeneous, deliberation did not force participants to take extreme positions in the same direction as prior to the deliberative event, but rather produced small changes in their opinions in the opposite direction implying that discussants broaden their perspective after being exposed to different viewpoints. This result could be regarded as an indication of deliberation’s potential even among like-minded participants, who even though they had very little prior knowledge about the issue under deliberation, they changed their attitudes after being exposed to the different viewpoints.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH SUGGESTIONS

The main limitation of the present study stems from the nature and size of our sample. Specifically, our sample consisted of 93 discussants who were students. Moreover, the study’s sample was overrepresented by female participants. Due to these shortcomings generalization of the results should be avoided.

Another limitation of the present design stems from the absence of a control group. Additionally since we measured participants’ opinions only prior and after the deliberation we cannot be sure at which point and stage of deliberation (i.e., after reading the material, after experts’ presentations, or after plenary discussion) significant changes took place. Hence, possible reasons for the changes in discussants’ attitudes could be the written material or the experts’ presentations and answers to the questions.

The application of Discourse Quality Index (DQI) (Steenbergen et al., 2003) could be the next step in reaching valuable conclusions. Finally, the correlation of the results with demographic elements could possibly disclose important evidence regarding which people are more likely to change their views and accept a different view or not.

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ZATO ŠTO JE POLITIČKO ZNANJE BITNO: UTJECAJ DELIBERACIJE NA MIŠLJENJE MLADIH GRAĐANA

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SAŽETAK Ovaj rad bavi se važnošću „znanja“ i „pristupa informacijama“ u formiranju mišljenja mladih građana o pojedinim temama kroz deliberativne procedure. Deliberativna demokracija, kao demokratski model i demokratska procedura koja dopušta sudionicima uključivanje u racionalan i otvoren dijalog prije odlučivanja o određenoj temi, teorijski je okvir na kojem se temelji istraživanje predstavljeno u ovom radu. Empirijski dio našeg rada temelji se na deliberativnom događaju koji se odvio u listopadu 2014. na instituciji za visoko obrazovanje Western Macedonia University of Applied Sciences u Grčkoj. Tema deliberacije bila je „Anketna istraživanja javnog mnijenja o politici“. Rezultati ovog istraživanja potvrđuju tezu iz relevantne literature koja naglašava kako deliberativne procedure obogaćuju znanje građana i tako im omogućavaju da učinkovito sudjeluju u procesu donošenja odluka.

KLJUČNE RIJEČI

DELIBERACIJA, ANKETNA ISTRAŽIVANJA JAVNOG MNIJENJA, DELIBERATIVNA DEMOKRACIJA, ZNANJE, POLITIČKA PARTICIPACIJA

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