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Agenda preference deliberations

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AGENDA PREFERENCE DELIBERATIONS

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University
Agriculture and Mechanical College
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in

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by
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ABSTRACT

Currently the public is relegated to the electoral process, surveys and polls, and group participation in order to voice their agenda preferences. Various literatures describe the decreasing influence of the general public within the agenda-setting portion of the policymaking process. This thesis assesses the agenda setting and public policy literatures in order to determine how issues become part of the policy agenda, looks to the public opinion literature to determine how capable the public is in being part of the policymaking process, and utilizes the deliberative democracy literature to construct deliberations that make it possible to get the public involved again in setting the agenda. A pre-test, post-test, treatment/control experimental method is used to conduct this preliminary research design that provides a template for creating public agenda preference deliberations. Participants are asked to rank their preferences concerning the national government's agenda and discuss them in an open-issue deliberative setting designed to generate a dialogue that doesn't require policy debate. Findings suggest that deliberations do cause participants to significantly change their preferences. Those participants who display openness to the deliberative process are especially likely to alter their preferences towards those issues discussed by the deliberative group. Finally, this thesis analyzes the findings and lists the benefits of creating agenda preference deliberations.

INTRODUCTION

How can the public influence the political process in a way that is supportive of its needs? Research in agenda-setting, public policy, and public opinion literature uncovers the lack of public involvement in the agenda setting portion of the policymaking process. Shouldn't people maintain a strong influence regarding what issues are being addressed within the government? And does deliberative democracy offer an opportunity for this? By utilizing the progress within deliberative democracy research, further experimentation should facilitate efforts to overcome this decline in public involvement. Deliberative democracy looks to benefit the public by providing another way of voicing public preferences once they have been contemplated in open discussion. Yet current research and experimentation seems consumed with the idea of the public deliberating about policy alternatives. It is the beginning of the policymaking process, agenda-setting, that is often overlooked. The public deserves a better way to voice their agenda preferences to policymakers, political campaigns, and the media. This research will describe how this can be better accomplished.

To begin, an overview of the agenda-setting, public policy, and public opinion literatures will assess the extent that the public is involved in the agenda-setting portion of the policymaking process, as well as the reasons that they are uninvolved. Secondly, a look into the benefits and boundaries of using deliberative democracy theory as a road map concludes that the theory can, in fact, be used to provide the public with better opportunities. A theoretical argument is then explored that explains the growing necessities of such involvement, and research questions and hypotheses are generated that establish the guidelines for creating agenda preference deliberations. Using these assertions, a pre-test, post-test experimental method is established using strict guidelines that are generated from previous deliberative democracy

research. This experiment serves as a preliminary example of how agenda preference deliberations would work, and tests how well each hypothesis determines the success of the overall experiment. Quantitative analysis considers each hypothesis in relation to the experimental success. Moreover, some further qualitative analysis explains relevant findings outside of the original hypotheses. The conclusion ties the current position of the public with regards to the agenda process of policymaking to the benefits of utilizing agenda preference deliberations as a further prescription to public involvement in the beginning of the policymaking process.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Media and Policy Agenda

1972 was the banner year for the emergence of the agenda-setting theory. McCombs and Shaw published their research which correlated public surveys with media content intensity. The authors researched the 1968 presidential campaign, finding that issues that were important to voters are the same issues that the media emphasizes. They concluded that the public relies on media coverage to determine what issues are salient. This conclusion suggested that the media tended to set public preferences concerning agenda items (at least during a political campaign). The authors developed the theory of agenda-setting behind the proposition that it occurred when extensive media attention to an issue enhanced its perceived importance within the public. Their scope on the agenda contended that salient issues within the media were what became important to the public.

Another publication with a similar take on agenda-setting involved an examination of how an issue becomes part of the American political agenda (Cobb and Elder 1972). Specifically, Cobb and Elder examined how issues expand onto the public stage by becoming socially significant. They advised that the growing complexities of government, bureaucracy, and policymaking were beginning to hinder the public's ability to involve itself in agenda-building, and professional networks or issue-based organizations were beginning to press forth their agendas.

Further research began to understand the public's role in this increasingly competitive agenda setting market. McCombs and Jian-Hua Zhu specifically targeted the public's capacity, diversity, and volatility with regards to being involved in the agenda-setting process for over forty years (1954-1994), finding that increased levels in education over those four decades

evidenced why agenda diversity and volatility went up within the public (1995). Whereas in the past the public's concern largely remained with a few issues, they considered the change that was occurring: "the public agenda has been transformed from an era where one or two overriding issues dominated the current stage to where many voices compete for attention."

The media of 1972 saw the public's reliance on a few large media sources, but the evolution of media outlets due to the rise of communication technologies created a different environment for pushing agendas onto the national stage. Considering this world of new media and public opinion, Shaw and Hamm concluded that the media was becoming more individualized and therefore national agendas are in danger of fragmenting (1997). They predicted that the national media would begin to take a backseat (with regards to influencing the public towards the agenda) to interest groups and other issue-specific invested sources. Such groups were beginning to be the focal investigation of researchers who studied the process of policy creation (Baumgartner and Jones 1993; Jones and Baumgartner 2005); specifically how policy began within the agenda setting process.

The media's role of informing the public about important government agendas seemed to have drifted from being a purveyor of public opinion to a generator of public opinion. The public has always followed the media in order to determine what issues are relevant. But, with the emergence of more media sources and growth in the size of government bureaucracy, the public's role in agenda-setting has become far more complex and asks for an understanding of many more issues than forty years ago. Furthermore, the growth of government has placed a burden on the media to cover what happens within each governmental system or process and report back to the public. As we will see in the next section, government and group influences

are having a growing effect on what and how agendas are portrayed within the media and directed back to the public.

Agenda Setting within the Policymaking Process

In an ideal world the agenda setting process would not be as much of an exclusionary portion of the policymaking process, but would instead offer viable opportunities for the general public to express their preferences to the various government venues. Currently this process seems to be heading in the wrong direction. Who actually sets the agenda is an important research question that has been considered in the public policy literature as well. Of large concern within these publications is the path of an issue from its initial stage of being added to the agenda to its final stage of becoming policy.

The first seminal publication on public policy that gave large regard to this first stage of agenda-setting came when John Kingdon found that the mass media impacted public opinion but lacked influence on the government (1984). He further challenged previous models which asserted that it was public opinion influencing the government's agenda. Kingdon's "garbage can" model illustrated how government officials generated the agenda (or shifted attention away from it) and influenced public opinion in support of their policy alternative directions: "These officials may attempt to mobilize the public in support of their objectives, but on many occasions they will choose not to. When they do mobilize expanded publics, furthermore, it may be more in pursuit of a passage than for agenda setting" (71). Important in this quote was the acknowledgement that government officials were more interested in gaining public support for the passage of a policy rather than gaining public support for agenda items. Kingdon showed how public officials used the media to relay public policy alternatives and gain support while disregarding the public's say in what items should have been on the agenda.

Kingdon also established that professional networks were beginning to scuffle over who got what put on the agenda (or left off); he explored in-depth these less-visible forces who tried to block or alter the agenda (1984). While elections and public opinion polls were visible means of illuminating to government officials what the public's agenda preferences were, groups who had direct means of communicating to these officials often greatly influenced policy decisions: "With regard to agenda setting...government officials and other activists affect the agenda in the mass public more than the other way around" (Kingdon 1984, 70). In the case of policymaking—in which agenda-setting is the beginning step—the media's role has drifted away from informing the government of the public's opinion on agendas, policies, and alternatives. Rather, the media relays to the public policy alternatives pre-determined by policymakers and other networks.

Kingdon further influenced agenda and policy research by separating the policymaking process into three streams: problem, policy, and politics. The first *problem* stream was recognition of a problem and the resulting effort to get it onto the agenda; it was largely controlled by elites. The *policy* stream concerned interest groups, bureaucrats, and experts' abilities to offer alternatives. The final stream, *politics*, involved the visibility of public opinion and elections, and gaining support for policy alternatives. A concern of Kingdon's (and still relevant today) was the lack of public involvement in the *problem* portion of the policymaking process.

There was more literature that detailed why the public deserved a larger voice with regard to the agenda-setting process of policymaking. Baumgartner and Jones analyzed ways in which issues were pushed onto the agendas of government venues, and suggested that how those issues were framed (by the relevant networks) determined whether they were accepted as important by the policymakers within that venue (1993). Their findings were such that issues were being

adapted to garner public attention and agenda acceptance *after* the issue had been accepted by a policymaking venue.

Baumgartner and Jones's public policy model was also used to explain increased efforts to control agendas by specialized groups and organizations. Policymakers relied heavily on professional organizations to save them time and provide them with necessary information, and this in turn leads to their influence over what is put on the agenda: "issues are less likely to emerge on the public agenda where specialists have developed a powerful sub-government and where they all agree on the best direction of government policy" (Baumgartner and Jones 1993, 43). In such agenda monopolies, the issue had been strictly defined, and increased public concerns about such an issue were quickly framed as illegitimate contenders to the agenda. They explained that within bureaucratic and policymaking subsystems, interest and lobby groups vied to keep "policy monopolies" in their favor. Expert groups continued to dominate the policy debate in governmental subsystems, keeping their "policy monopolies" out of harm's way, and any policy alternative debate out of the public eye.

Baumgartner and Jones more recently investigated the agenda-setting process, considering that "selective attention in individuals is agenda setting in politics" (2005, 18). In other words, policymakers have only so much time and resources to decide what issues are added to the agenda, or what issues should be debated while in office (or during campaigns). It is because of this lack of time and resources that they must rely upon the information provided by professional networks, organizations, and groups that serve not only as informational providers but often as proponents of a specific policy alternative. Baumgartner and Jones's analysis inferred that the influence of professional networks (as well as "selective attention") were often

the reasoning of policymakers for taking up or changing the policy agenda, irrespective of public opinion.

Public Opinion and Information Processing

It is evident from the agenda-setting literature that public opinion is directly influenced by the media. The media relays public policy alternative debate to the public to a much greater degree than agenda alternatives. Should the public's sphere of information gathering and opinion giving live principally in the policy alternative, decision-making segment of the policymaking process? A look into the public opinion literature suggests that the public is hindered by three factors when processing policy information: 1) they lack full information to make proper decisions 2) they lack the resources or ability to compete for influence over policymakers 3) they lack the desire to be involved in the policymaking process.

Firstly, Zaller suggested that people lacked many of the facts concerning issues to hold educated policy positions: “[Political information] is unavoidably selective and unavoidably enmeshed in stereotypical frames of reference that highlight only a portion of what is going on. In consequence, the public opinion that exists on a given issue can rarely be considered a straightforward response to ‘the facts’ of the situation” (1992, 13-14). Zaller's examination into the necessity of the public to rely heavily on elite information or cues through the media concluded that—for reasons of motivation, knowledge, and time constraint—public opinion may not be well suited to fully understand policy alternatives.

Secondly, while most citizens simply didn't have the capability, capacity, or desire to gather the information about a policy alternative, they were often hindered by the same inabilities when it came to participating and personally influencing government officials or campaigns in order to address issues they deemed important:

Many citizens lack the de facto ability to participate, especially in more costly but more influential ways. Further, when they do participate—either directly through the vote or indirectly through opinion polls—low absolute and relative levels of information lower the likelihood that this participation will accurately reflect the individual, group, and collective interests of the public (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996, 59-60).

This explained another overarching problem with using elections and opinion polls to address public opinion concerning policy output—people were often incapable personally or as an unorganized public to influence the government agenda in a way that fit their preferences.

Thirdly, there is literature concerned with the lack of the public's desire to be involved in the policymaking process. Hibbing and Theiss-Morse contended that in a system the public would consider ideal, they would leave the decision-making (policy) process to the officials or experts, but would like to be “convinced that the political system deals with issues that are relevant to some ordinary people” (2002, 225). At the same time: “The last thing people want is to be more involved in political decision making” (2002, 1). This statement wasn't the most optimistic view of the public taken from public opinion or deliberative democracy theorists, but it did highlight some basic concerns about public involvement in the political process. Hibbing and Theiss-Morse suggested that people don't like confrontation, and discussing policy alternatives necessarily brought confrontation.

Hibbing and Theiss-Morse's further take on this quandary was very insightful:

The theorists' problem is in thinking that forcing people to be involved in the political process that the people perceive to be irrelevant and biased would somehow have a beneficial effect—that people would eventually be drawn in or that their participation would lead them to conclude the process was fair and relevant. The empirical evidence indicates this is not the case. Theorists are putting the cart before the horse. Exposing people to a system they believe is flawed will only add to their frustration. If people are first convinced that the political system deals with issues that are relevant to some ordinary people and does so in a way that is not

designed to benefit only politicians and special interests, then people's natural affinity for conflict, taking sides, and all the rest will kick in (2002, 225).

Hibbing and Theiss-Morse suggested that people don't want to concern themselves with the daily hassles of career politicians. They just want to know what they are up to.

Overall, it can be inferred taken from the public opinion literature that a majority of people do not have the capacity, resources, or desire to be involved in the policy alternatives debate (or Kingdon's *politics* stage of policymaking). A possible solution may be in getting people more involved in the policymaking process —establish better opportunities for the public to become involved earlier in the policymaking process. Asking people what should be on the government agenda asks far less and is less confrontational than asking for their opinion on policy alternatives, and it just might lead to motivation because of their involvement in the policymaking process from the beginning.

Alternative within Deliberative Democracy?

Deliberative democracy is one area of research that addresses the contention that the public should have a greater voice in policymaking matters. Amy Guttman and Dennis Thompson considered that deliberative democracy should be defined in such a way that the public is given a deliberative role to “justify decisions in a process in which they give each other reasons that are mutually acceptable and generally accessible, with the aim of reaching conclusions that are binding...” (2004, 7). This definition gives a burden to the public which, when considering the public opinion literature, creates informational, capability, and motivational standards that are difficult to untangle. Without an informed public (a public which understands the varieties and intricacies of the overwhelming amount of policy alternatives), it

isn't realistic to expect people to be motivated about policy outcome debate, especially when they are not visibly involved in the agenda discussion.

Another offered definition of deliberation that restricted the public to making decisions about policy alternatives came from John Gastil: "When people deliberate, they carefully examine a problem and arrive at a well-reasoned solution after a period of inclusive, respectful consideration of diverse points of view" (2008, 8). The restraints of this definition are such that people are expected to "arrive at a well-reasoned solution" without being fully informed (or as informed as policymakers and professional networks or experts who spend their careers attending to policy).

Further literature calling for deliberative decisions or solutions went one step further, informing that consensus changes the shape of deliberation from discriminatory to validating (Barabas 2004). According to Barabas' analysis, when consensus was established all participants changed their opinion in roughly the same direction. When consensus was not established, participants with weakly-held opinions were easily persuaded, while participants with strong opinions do not change their opinions or changed their opinion in the opposite direction. Such deliberations requiring consensus based on deliberative discussion (argument and debate) surely polarize virtually any group that includes participants with strongly-held but opposing opinions. But, other scholars have suggested that deliberation inherently lacked mutual respect because of glaring differences in persuasion, rhetoric, and rational thought (Sanders 1997). People who speak less continued to do so, and those who dominated discussions continue to discard the opinion of others. So, certain groups are disenfranchised, while others thrive in a deliberative environment.

It has been further considered that deliberating towards consensus generates group instability (Knight and Johnson 1994). Knight and Johnson suggested that deliberations begin with parameters around what is at stake, then proceed with rational argument: “The way to possibly avoid instability, then, is to induce a shared understanding regarding the dimensions of conflict. Democratic deliberation might help accomplish this by allowing relevant constituencies to sort out, and hopefully reduce, the dimensions over which they disagree” (Knight and Johnson 1994, 282). It therefore seems prudent to begin deliberation with aspects of the discussion that can be agreed upon, thus creating some middle ground for the deliberation. Although allowing “relevant constituencies” an avenue to consolidate their arguments and persuade others could foster some degree of the disagreement warned by Barabas and Saunders. Promoting opinions or attitudes that express group similarities can go a long way towards a successful and beneficial deliberation. Because of the inherent conflict that begins deliberation, consensus should not be viewed as a mandatory or even achievable goal. Knight and Johnson’s recommendation to begin with agreeing parameters of what is at stake offers a good first step for deliberation.

The public is considered to be deficient when it comes to arguing over policy alternatives, not only with regard to an informational (Zaller 1992) or motivational (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2002) standpoint, but with regard to their ability to bring rational argument to the table (Sanders 1997). People vary greatly in their capacity for rational argument. The public’s capacities for cognition, reason, logic and proper communication are subpar by most successful deliberation theory standards (Rosenburg 2007). Rosenburg further states that, because of this lack of reasoning skills, emotion and affect often regulate people’s discourse during deliberation:

Consequently most people are unable to deliberate adequately. In deliberation, they typically assert their preferences and rarely judge or defend those preferences relative to a life plan or an overarching conception of the good. When approaching others, they do not

appreciate possible differences in basic understanding or reasoning and consequently they do not present their own views in a sufficiently elaborated manner so that others can understand them. In addition, they tend to view the different views that others express as an obstruction or simply incorrect. Overall the opportunity for discussion and argument is not viewed as cooperative exercise leading to greater insight and mutual benefit, but rather it is understood as a zero sum game (2007, 345-346).

This view of people's ability to deliberate effectively went beyond those informational and motivational shortcomings; it addresses a basic psychological concern with people's rational and rhetorical devices which vary greatly—creating unbalanced deliberative groups. Moreover, the overall capacity of the public to deliberate effectively and according to the standards and expectations of many deliberative democracy scholars is often viewed as insufficient.

There is one thing that can be expected of people—to have a higher degree of rational understanding of the issues that are important to them personally (and for society overall), and which of those issues should be priorities for the government. If most deliberations center on policy alternative discussions, it has been asserted that this is not what the public desires nor is capable of. Is there another form of public deliberation than that of debating over policy alternatives? We have examined the policymaking process—with its beginning being agenda-setting—and the state of public opinion in the earlier sections. Public deliberation concerning what issues are important for the agenda-setting stage of the policymaking process doesn't overly burden people with unrealistic expectations of becoming informed and motivated about the issue in order to rationalize and communicate effectively to others in order to come to some policy consensus. At least for now, people are just ill-equipped to deliberate in this capacity. But, there are several promising areas of deliberative democracy that provide a roadmap for overcoming the predicaments aforementioned.

There is definitely a great push in deliberative theory to account for the informational shortcomings of the public. D. M. Ryfe offered a great perspective when describing “mechanisms [that] seem to be particularly associated with successful deliberation” (2005, 63-64). Specifically, regardless of the type of deliberation, (1) the process needs a set of rules to abide by. Also, and with the emphasis of scholars such as Robert Goodin (2000), there is found a belief that (2) deliberation should involve culture and personal experience when discussions are framed. Ryfe characterized (3) a need for proper information and leadership when organizing and producing the deliberation. Finally, (4) people must believe that the deliberative process has valuable meaning in order to become motivated about the process. These recommendations offered a good glimpse into what scholars now consider pertinent areas to develop in order for deliberation theory to have a firm ground in our political system and throughout our public.

One thing noticeable in Ryfe’s mechanisms of deliberation that veers from the Gutmann and Thompson or Gastil definitions is that there was no requirement to come to some conclusive answer about a problem or set of problems. In other words, Ryfe’s basis for deliberation didn’t require people to come to some policy solution. Instead, Ryfe was concerned with using the deliberative process to the public’s advantage; so that the public could influence the political process in a way that was supportive of its needs.

Ryfe suggested that organizers should “avoid an explicit linkage between deliberation and policy making” (2005, 60). Furthermore, he offered that deliberation should serve as a consulting process to government officials and not a definitive solution. These analyses brought about through Ryfe’s research suggested that deliberation should offer insight but not alternatives. In other words, let people influence the questions being asked in government, but let the better informed officials or experts debate the policy decisions that best suit the people.

Deliberative democracy scholars should consider Ryfe's call for public deliberative bodies to "avoid policy making" (2005, 65).

Deliberative democracy research is often concerned with outcomes that determine successful deliberations, such as preference change. There has been belief that effective deliberation brings discovery and change in participant preferences (Manin 1987, 351-352). Offering that deliberation was legitimized not by some final act of group agreement or consensus; it was within the deliberative process itself that individuals discover and rediscover their preferences, and subsequently make alterations to them. In other words, individual preference changes could offer some legitimacy to the act of deliberating. One concern with this approach to deeming deliberations effective or legitimate is that change can infuse a rational, communicative group as well as a divisive or easily persuaded group. Preference change in deliberation should look for change because of valuable group interaction, rather than persuasion by one or few participants.

Shifts in participant attitudes can be said to account for the overarching view that deliberation be used as a tool for increasing the public's political sophistication. A Gastil and Dillard study tested four individual-based variables and examined whether their deliberations could be considered successful in creating political sophistication: "This study's emphasis [is] on changes in schematic organization and attitude certainty rather than aggregate changes in attitudes" (Gastil and Dillard 1999, 6-8). The authors were looking for a strengthening of individual attitudes and ideology. It is instructive to examine individual changes as a result of deliberation, but, strengthening attitudes and ideology should be closely monitored if it is to be considered a prerequisite for a successful deliberation. Such a barometer for deliberation can easily produce success when the individuals actually diverged their preferences (whereas change

shifted in diverging directions). Deliberation should promote alternative viewpoints, tolerance, and group discovery.

Another concern within the deliberative setting comes from David Dutwin, who asserted that people who are more prone to speak in a deliberative setting have prior-constrained beliefs: “Individuals with high levels of prior political conversation (it is inferred) have more crystallized opinions ready and waiting to be vocalized” (2003, 258). This largely applies to Gastil and Dillard’s findings that deliberation produces constraint. If the people in a deliberative setting willing to offer their opinions are only the ones who already have polarized or “constrained” their opinions into a firm ideological stance, then we again find the deliberative process troublesome. In such a deliberative situation, discussion would inevitably lead to either debate between opposing constrained participants with alternative views or general agreement with the opinion of one or more individuals who hold prior-constraints regarding the issue concerned. So, if preference, attitude, or opinion change is to be used as a gauge for successful deliberation, then it should be further examined as to whether that change is due to open group discussion or the prevailing opinions of one or a few participants.

Fishkin’s Deliberative Poll Model

James Fishkin is one scholar who undertook an effort to reconcile those informational shortcomings found within the public opinion literature (and still does today). Fishkin viewed deliberation as discussion in which all participants are given an equal opportunity to offer and defend their preferences in an effort to come to some conclusion or decision (1992, 1995). Fishkin only required an effort towards some decision. He understood the tumultuous territory that might be spawned when there was a requirement for consensus. One way in which Fishkin’s deliberative polls managed to stay away from outright debate exposing the attitude constraints of

the participants was to not require any type of consensus as to policy answers. Instead, the purpose of each deliberative group was to evaluate the issue given to them, and come up with questions to ask experts and politicians. “We wanted to insulate the participants as much as possible from the social pressures of reaching a consensus on the substance” (1995, 185). Such a rule of deliberation has been shown to allow participants ease when expressing their opinions to the group, as well as being open to other participant’s opinions (Ryfe 2005; Fishkin 1992, 1995). Fishkin attributed this lack of polarization to the absence of a verdict or consensus requirement.

Fishkin further argued that deliberation should be used to get the public more involved in the political process and improve public awareness in those areas discussed in the public opinion literature: informational shortcomings and lack of political efficacy (Fishkin 1992, 1995).

Fishkin considered deliberation a democratic reform that could answer some of the public’s deficiencies, and give the public a venue to express their preferences that was less influenced by the media and government officials and a genuine expression of the public’s preferences outside of voting and opinion polls. He considered a deliberative venue to be a better way to communicate to politicians and policymakers a truer, contemplated form of public opinion; this was his reasoning for creating “deliberative polls” (1995).

Deliberative polls offered a good evaluation of Fishkin’s efforts to use deliberation in order to include the public in the process of policymaking. His model consisted of a pre-deliberation and post-deliberation survey which showed how the process of deliberating could change (enlighten) the opinions of participants and further motivate participants and the public to become and remain informed about politics. The deliberative meetings were in small groups of about fifteen people which discussed policy on three issue points: economic policy, foreign policy, and family issues. Participants were supplied in advance information packets concerning

the specific issue they were to deliberate about. These deliberative polls served good purpose in exploring what public opinion would be if people were informed and motivated enough to contemplate specific policy questions.

Fishkin was apprehensive about some of the same concerns found in the agenda-setting literature—that the media is a powerful influence over public opinion. Although Fishkin saw that “the agenda of questions is likely to be set by the needs of the news cycle, not, in most cases, the interests of the public,” his opportunity to reconcile this obstruction to the public was hindered by his use of fixed issue topics (economics, foreign policy, and family issues) in his model (1995, 156). While these issues may be of concern to many participants, others may have had greater concerns of interest, or may have had little interest in one or more of these issues.

One finding Fishkin looked for in every deliberative poll was for preference change in the participants. He found in a significant number of cases that the initial judgments revealed by participants differed from their post-deliberation responses (2003). While he surmised that the information provided was cause for much of this opinion change, he also allowed that the act of deliberating itself could account for some of the change response.

Fishkin found further evidence stimulated by the act of deliberating together:

In cases with ranking questions, we have found a higher degree of preference ‘structuration’ making cycles less likely, after deliberation compared with the views in initial questionnaires. In other words, a higher percentage of the sample has single-peaked preferences. Respondents may not agree on a single answer but they agree on what they are agreeing—or disagreeing—about (2003, 130).

Here Fishkin’s findings showed that participants tended to agree on the importance of issues as a result of the deliberation itself. But, these findings were only concerned with those pre-conceived issue boundaries made beforehand (economic policy, foreign policy, family issues). By limiting

preference rankings or responses to specific issues within the questionnaires, participants were not totally open to contemplate *all* issues or agendas, and therefore it cannot be further inferred that participants would retain this “preference structuration” post-deliberation if asked to rank and deliberate upon an indefinite number of open-ended issues or agendas. Would a deliberation about open-ended issues garner the same findings—that participants agree on the importance of issues, and as a result change their preference rankings accordingly?

Whether Fishkin’s choice of deliberative issues were examples of the issues the public views as priorities for government policymaking or not, there were three results of Fishkin’s deliberative polls that lend promise to the public and deliberative democracy theory: (1) The process of deliberation works to heighten the consideration and motivations of participants, as permitted by the lack of consensus requirement and proven by the change in opinion post-deliberation. (2) “Deliberative citizens offer a useful contrast to the self-selected intense groups and lobbyists who tend to dominate ‘town meetings’ and similar open forums,” (3) Deliberative polls provide a way for the public to voice their opinions about policy alternatives, but also offers a great model for creating a deliberative venue for the public to openly voice their agenda preferences (2003, 131).

THEORY

What should be further explored within these various literatures and policymaking research is whether it is of greater benefit to our democratic system to ask the public to give its preferences on policy outcomes as they are being debated by elites, or whether it would be more prudent to find ways to get the public involved in Kingdon's *problem* stream—determining the priority of problems and determining when/if they should be put on the policy agenda.

Currently the American public's involvement in policymaking is such that they are expected to remain attentive to alternatives produced from within the same system that limits their involvement from the beginning; it overlooks their say regarding the agenda yet expects full understanding of the policy alternatives at the end. Expecting people who are not career politicians, experts, or even activists, to follow policy issues closely enough to make informed decisions on the alternatives asks much more of the public than for them to become more involved in deciding what issues will go onto the agenda. The current system seems illogical; people often lack the information, motivation, and rational thought to come to conclusive answers as to policy alternatives.

Admittedly, the public has some voice in the agenda, just as it does with policy decisions. Largely, the public's voice with regard to policy decisions comes from their vote choice and public opinion polls; both are seen as referendums on issues. But what is the source of the public's voice in the arena of policy agenda-setting? Surveys and polls use pre-determined issues and often frame questions in a manner that is a choice between one policy alternative or another. Campaigns debate issues that are likely to stir voter interest, but can easily pick-and-choose issues that are likely to gain voter support. The public can join organizations or groups that work to push agendas onto the national scene, but these groups cannot be considered a proper

representation of the unorganized public's agenda preferences; they are inclusive and push forward their own interests. Should today's agenda process—ruled by experts and professional networks as found in the policy literature—be considered proper gauges to the public's interests, or should the general public be offered a better alternative for communicating its agenda preferences?

What we are currently asking the public to do in the policymaking process is a demand that is too high for many to pay, and results in the system we have today—politicians and government officials who set the agenda; experts, interest groups, and professional networks who create and push forward policy alternatives (or block agendas); a mass media who relays these messages to the public; and a public who inputs what they believe to be their best alternatives through voting and polls as if they were taking a multiple-choice quiz. Shouldn't the public *first* be more involved in setting the agenda; then secondly allowing the policymakers, experts, and research networks the ability to create policy alternatives, introduce policy debate, and generate solutions using public opinion and voter referendum as a guide? Isn't asking for public involvement in this second portion of the policymaking process exactly what the public opinion literature expresses concern with?

While understanding policy alternatives may not be the public's strong point, there are three beneficial reasons for giving the public increased initiative in determining what goes on the agenda: (1) Informational costs aren't nearly as high. The public cannot be expected to take the time to fully understand the costs and benefits of the many policy alternatives that concern policymakers. (2) Public discourse should begin with something people are more capable of addressing—their own agenda preferences—rather than determining policy alternatives. It has been shown that most within the public lack the rational capabilities to make proper

considerations regarding policy alternatives (Sanders 1997). (3) The public may become more supportive and attentive towards a process that they were directly involved in from the beginning. It has been shown that the public lacks motivation with regards to being involved in political debate and confrontation (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2002). Simply understanding and prioritizing the problems that are out there doesn't create as much political turmoil (or apprehension) as public debate concerning policy alternatives. Moreover, suppositions that the public should be more in-tune with the policymaking process might have merit if the public viewed their role in the agenda-setting portion as relevant.

What deliberative democracy research often fails to acknowledge is this earliest policymaking stage in which the public should *first* be involved. The right of the public to determine what issues are put on the agenda (and when) seems an intuitive and imperative function of a proper democratic system. The American system is lacking in this case, especially with the expansion of government agencies, bureaucracies, and professional networks. People can easily rank what issues are most important to them or what they would prefer the government to be treating as priorities; and this is without the unwanted involvement in political conflict. Finding out what these issues are is a much lower cost to all involved, and could easily serve policymakers and political campaigns when they determine what gets on the agenda.

Much of deliberative democracy continues to focus on creating ways for the public to deliberate (debate) about their differences concerning policy alternatives. There are many inherent problems (low information, low motivation, insufficient rational thought, discrepancies in rhetoric, and emotional affect) that accompany deliberating towards policy alternatives. Such deliberations rely on participants becoming motivated enough to learn about policy alternatives, then gather in a confrontational environment that is not conducive to most people's rational

thought and rhetorical capabilities. Deliberating strictly about what issues should be on the government agenda largely leaves behind these difficulties.

From Theory to Experiment

The literature review and theory chapters describe the need for agenda preference deliberations, and such an experiment should show how effective the changing boundaries of such deliberations might be. The beginning reason for creating this preliminary experiment is to establish the different rule requirements involved in agenda preference deliberations (as opposed to policy alternative deliberations). Such deliberations can substantially leave behind a long list of problematic concerns that easily arise within policy outcome deliberations: informational requirements (Zaller 1992), motivational deficits (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2002), apprehension towards confrontation (Rosenburg 2007; Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2002), rational and rhetorical capabilities (Sanders 1997), emotional affect (Rosenburg 2007), limitations of consensus (Rosenburg 2007; Ryfe 2005), and divisiveness caused by debate (Knight and Johnson 1994).

But, such rule changes can be offered without creating an experiment. The outcome of this experiment serves specific purposes for the field of deliberative democracy beyond that of simply providing a rejuvenating template and rules. It tests for evidence of a successful outcome based on changes in individual participants. Proven success would give further reason to replicate agenda preference deliberation experiments using the same (or a similar) model. Evidence of success would warrant experiments using more generalizable pools of participants to be examined in order to further verify the usefulness of such deliberations. Success would also establish credibility for use of such agenda deliberations as their original purpose intends—to inform policymakers, political campaigns, and the media of public preferences. Such

deliberations could provide aggregate findings to any number of government levels (national, state, local, etc.) based on participants' discussed and considered agenda preferences.

EXPERIMENT

Design

The design used to test the first hypothesis is a random treatment/control group, pre-test, post-test experiment. The design used to test the second and third hypotheses is a random single group (treatment), pre-test, post-test design.

Sample

Individuals took part in the experiment at the Media Effects Laboratory located on the campus of Louisiana State University. The experiment used a sample of ninety-six Louisiana State University students who were recruited from introduction to political science classes and given extra credit for their participation. A total of six treatment groups and six control groups were comprised of forty-eight treatment and forty-eight control participants; there were a total of twelve groups comprised of between five to ten participants (averaging eight participants per group). Treatment groups received deliberation between pre-post tests, while the control groups did not deliberate but received both pre and post-tests.

Procedures

Both treatment and control groups received the same pre-and post questionnaire.¹ Control groups were instructed to stop at a certain point in the experiment which concluded the pre-test, during which they were given approximately an eight to ten minute break in which they were asked to not speak about their responses. Control groups were then instructed to finish the post-test. Treatment groups were instructed to stop at the same point in the experiment, and then begin a group discussion. Instructions were given that it was not necessary to speak, and that the discussion was not meant to be a debate of issue sides or outcomes, but rather what issues should

¹ Questionnaire is Appendix A

be on the government's agenda (they were asked to discuss their agenda preference rankings with the group).² The moderator goals were to establish that no policy alternative or outcome debates threatened the deliberation, that everyone had equal opportunity to speak, and to bring the deliberation towards three areas concerning the participants agenda preferences: (1) were there agendas that the group largely agreed should be priorities; (2) were there agenda preferences of personal importance to participants; (3) were there "outlier" agenda preferences that participants believed were being overlooked by either the government or the public.³ Deliberations lasted an average of ten minutes.

Hypotheses

In order to test whether the experiment can be considered a success or not, several questions should be considered. It has been suggested that change in participant's preferences or opinions after deliberation is one signal that the deliberation has been a success (Fishkin 1995, 2003; Manin 1987). Therefore, it is prudent to first determine whether there is significant overall change in participant preferences because of the act of deliberation itself. Expectations are to find amounts of change within the treatment groups significantly beyond those findings from control groups. Findings in this direction would offer the first step into supporting the effectiveness of the experiment.

H1: *Deliberating about agenda priorities will show that those who participated in deliberations change their agenda preferences more-so than those who did not participate in deliberations.*

An analysis of variance model will be used to first test the effect of the independent variable in question—*condition*—on the dependent variable—*overall preference ranking*

² Participant instructions found in Appendix B

³ Moderator instructions found in Appendix B

change. Secondly, an analysis of covariance model will likewise test the independent and dependent variables while controlling for an alternative variable—*discuss weekly*.⁴

Participants were given open-ended agenda preference ranking responses in both the pre and post-tests. They are used to determine the dependent variable as a scaled interval value. The preference ranking question asks participants to list five agenda preference items in order of importance.⁵ The dependent variable code is determined by assessing individual change in each participant's agenda preference ranking. It is coded as an interval value and ranges from a possible score of zero to thirty for each participant. This is determined by adding a score of 1 each time a preference changes a ranking position.⁶ Furthermore, each time a preference was added to or removed from the participant's ranking list that item received a score as if it were ranked as number six in importance.⁷ These scores are totaled in order to determine the dependent variable value of each participant.⁸

The independent variable *condition* is the causal variable, whereas the control condition is coded with a nominal value of zero and the treatment condition has a nominal value of one. Another alternative variable controlled for is *discuss weekly*, which represents a ratio of zero to

⁴ This second test is based on the Dutwin (2003) assertion that prior political discussion constrains preferences.

⁵ Question 1 in Appendix A

⁶ For example, if a participant ranked "economy" as #1 pre-treatment, then re-ranked "economy" #2 in the post-treatment/control list, this rank change would receive a score of 1 (to be added to the total change for that participant).

⁷ For example, if a participant ranked "economy" as #1 pre-treatment, then failed to rank "economy" in the post-treatment/control list, this change would represent a score of 5 (as if "economy" were now #6 in the post-treatment list)

⁸ A full example would be as such- If a participant ranked (pre-treatment/control):
#1 "economy" #2 "national security" #3 "education" #4 "health care" #5 "energy";
then ranked (post-treatment/control):
#1 "national security" #2 "economy" #3 "education" #4 "environment" #5 "energy";
the dependent variable score would represent: $1+1+2+1=5$.

Plus one (for "economy" change #1 to #2), plus one ("national security" change #2 to #1), plus two ("health care" change #4 to #6), and plus two ("environment" change #6 to #4).

seven days, determined by participant's response to the question of how many days a participant usually discussed politics with family or friends.⁹

Looking deeper into the success of this experiment requires a second account of change in participant's preferences, but based solely on whether deliberation incentivized participants to change their preference in the direction of the issues that were specifically discussed during the deliberation. Such an analysis will go beyond the previous question by determining the extent of success as a result of the deliberation. Knight and Johnson (1994) warranted that debate and a requirement for a consensus causes divisiveness, and therefore deliberation should first utilize what the group finds in common. Because debate and consensus are not definitive aspects of these deliberations, it should be found that group change will tend towards group cohesion (rather than divisiveness). Furthermore, two moderator instructions consider similar group preferences as well as personal experience, providing more promise of group cohesion. Findings are expected to result in consistent preference change in the direction of the group discussed topics.

H2: *Participants involved in deliberation will rank the agenda preferences that were discussed in deliberation increasingly more in their post-deliberation questionnaires than in their pre-deliberation questionnaires.*

An analysis of variance model will be used for H2 in order to determine any significant increase in preference change when taken into account only issues discussed in deliberation.

To quantify this hypothesis, only those forty-eight participants involved in deliberations were used as data sources. First, a list of preferences discussed within each of the six deliberative groups verified whether each individual participant ranked any of those preferences in either the

⁹ Question 8 in Appendix A

pre or post-test.¹⁰ Next, a scaled value similar to the H1 dependent variable was used to code the change in participant's pre-deliberation ranking and post-deliberation rankings of issues discussed during deliberation.¹¹ The interval value represents the preference rankings that were listed in the participant's pre-test and were also discussed in the group's deliberation—*pre-test value*—as well as a second value that represents the preference rankings listed in the participant's post-test and were discussed in the group's deliberation—*post-test value*. Although this is not a cause/effect test, further utilizing a simple linear regression graph for this model shows the direction and strength to which participants increasingly changed their preferences towards the issues discussed in group deliberation.

Even with supporting findings, the first two hypotheses still would not adequately describe a successful deliberation. While the groups may converge towards like-preferences, final considerations should consider whether that convergence is due to group openness and contemplation or a result of persuasion. This additional research question not only helps determine the success of the deliberation, but can be used to determine if specific participants are (or are not) likely to change their preference ranking from pre-test to post-test. It looks for predictive verification that participants who are open to the deliberative process will change their preferences according to what issues are discussed. Barabas suggested that participants with weakly-held opinions are easily persuaded (2004). So, this question asks whether there is statistical evidence that suggests that open-minded participants change their preferences more (and to what extent) than participants with constrained preferences. In order to gauge this change, each participant's response to a question concerning openness to the deliberative process

¹⁰ Amount of issues ranged from 4-10 per group.

¹¹ Scaling on either pre or post-ranking list are valued from 0-15, whereas a ranking of #1 is scored 5, #2 is scored 4, #3 is scored 3, #4 is scored 2, and #5 is scored 1. Therefore, an individual who ranked 5 issues which were all discussed is coded a value of 15 (5+4+3+2+1=15).

will support participant openness or constraint. Results are expected to show some significance based on two factors. First, openness should show a higher tendency to change preferences. Secondly, participants who are determined to have constrained preferences will be more likely to persuade others towards their beliefs (Dutwin 2003). Finding any significant evidence of this will dictate further analysis concerning group cohesiveness versus group persuasion.

H3: *Based on a scaled response regarding how open participants were to the deliberative process, an increased score suggesting openness to the deliberative process will also show an increased amount of agenda preference change from the pre-deliberation questionnaire to the post-deliberation questionnaire.*

Two simple linear regression models will be used for H3 to determine whether there is a linear relationship regarding: (1) *overall preference ranking change and process openness* (2) *deliberation preference ranking change and process openness*. In both cases *process openness* acts as the independent variable.¹²

Similar to the H2 model, the data only uses those forty-eight participants who took part in deliberation. An initial test on the H1 model's dependent variable—*overall preference ranking change*—is done in order to assess participants overall preference change when the *process openness* independent variable is accounted for. A second test measures a new dependent variable value—*deliberated preference ranking change*—created for the H3 model, which is coded as the *post-test value* from the H2 model subtracted from the *pre-test value* used in H2 model.¹³ The *process openness* variable accounts for how open participants were towards the deliberative process. This variable quantifies participants' propensity to be open-minded during

¹² Represented by Appendix A, post-test question 2

¹³ This variable resulted in scores ranging from -2 (meaning this participant decreased the ranking values of their preferences away from what preferences were discussed in the deliberation) to 11 (meaning this participant increased their preferences significantly according to those preferences discussed in the deliberation).

the deliberative discussion and towards other participants' opinions; while lack of openness towards the deliberative process shows participant constraint towards the deliberative process.

ANALYSIS

Hypothesis 1

The first test of H1 describes overwhelming evidence in support of the hypothesis. This model is first described in Table 1 using summary statistics. In Table 1 it is apparent that the two groups (treatment and control) vary significantly when comparing the means of the dependent variable on the independent variable. Treatment groups averaged preference change much

Table 1: Hypothesis 1 Summary Statistics

<u>Condition</u>	<u>Mean*</u>	<u>Standard Deviation</u>	<u>95% Confidence Intervals</u>
Control	3.15	3.35	2.17 to 4.12
Treatment	9.65	5.42	8.07 to 11.22
Total	6.40	4.39	

*Mean difference is 6.5

more-so (9.65 value) than control groups (3.15 value). Also, the mean difference and confidence intervals describe the large discrepancy in the groups. The standard deviation is understandably higher in the treatment groups, based on the expectation from the hypothesis that treatment groups will have a higher dependent variable value based on more overall preference change. This standard deviation expresses the participant discrepancies on the dependent variable as well. For instance, many control participants didn't change their preferences at all, and the highest individual preference change from pre to post-tests was a value of twelve. As for participants in the treatment groups only three (out of forty-eight) did not change their preferences at all

(dependent variable value of zero), while there were many participants with dependent variable values in the teens and twenties, with the highest a twenty-six out of thirty (meaning this participant nearly totally changed his/her preferences post-deliberation).

Next the model tests with analysis of variance in Table 2, using only the dependent variable and the independent variables for H1. Within this data there are two areas of note: the F-value and the adjusted R-squared value. First, the F-value significance is at the .001 level,

Table 2: Hypothesis 1 Analysis of Variance

<u>Source</u>	<u>Sum of Squares*</u>	<u>Degree of Freedom</u>	<u>Mean Sum of Squares</u>	<u>F-value</u>
Model	1014	1	1014	49.93**
Error	1909	94	20.31	
Total	2923	95	30.77	

*Adjusted R-squared = .34

**P-value < .001

showing overwhelming significance for the model. Second, the R-squared value suggests that over one-third of the effect on the dependent variable is because of the independent variable of group condition. Table 2 shows statistically that the first hypothesis is significant—deliberation does cause increased changes in agenda preferences. Therefore, the null hypothesis that *deliberating about agenda priorities will show that participants who participated in deliberations do not have increased changes to their agenda preferences more than those who did not participate in deliberations* can be rejected with confidence.

Finally, an analysis of covariance enters the alternative effects variable into the model to test for added effect size.¹⁴ Table 3 shows the second model, which includes the alternative variable *discuss weekly* in an analysis of covariance.¹⁵ The analysis of covariance shows that,

Table 3: Hypothesis 1 Analysis of Covariance

<u>Source</u>	<u>Sum of Squares</u>	<u>Degrees of Freedom</u>	<u>Mean Sum of Squares</u>	<u>F-value</u>
Model	1213.32	2	606.66	33***
Condition	1066.21	1	1066.21	58***
Discuss Weekly	199.32	1	199.32	10.84**
Error	1709.64	93	18.38	
Total	2922.96*	95	30.77	

*Adjusted R-squared = .40

**P-value < .01

***P-value < .001

when added to the original model, *discuss weekly* also represents a significant F-value, showing that it too had some effect on the dependent variable.

Looking further into this finding, participants who pre-tested higher ratios of political discussion per week were actually less likely to change their agenda preferences.¹⁶ Figure 1 displays a two-way scatter plot as well as a regression line that visualizes the slope showing

¹⁴ All other control and demographic variables were tested using analysis of covariance, with only the *discuss weekly* variable adding a significant effect to the model; therefore, all other control variables were dropped from the model due to lack of significance.

¹⁵ There was no significant interaction effect found between *condition* and *discuss weekly*.

¹⁶ Correlation and regression tests both demonstrate that the *discuss weekly* variable had a negative correlation with the dependent variable; as *discuss weekly* increased, the dependent variable value decreased.

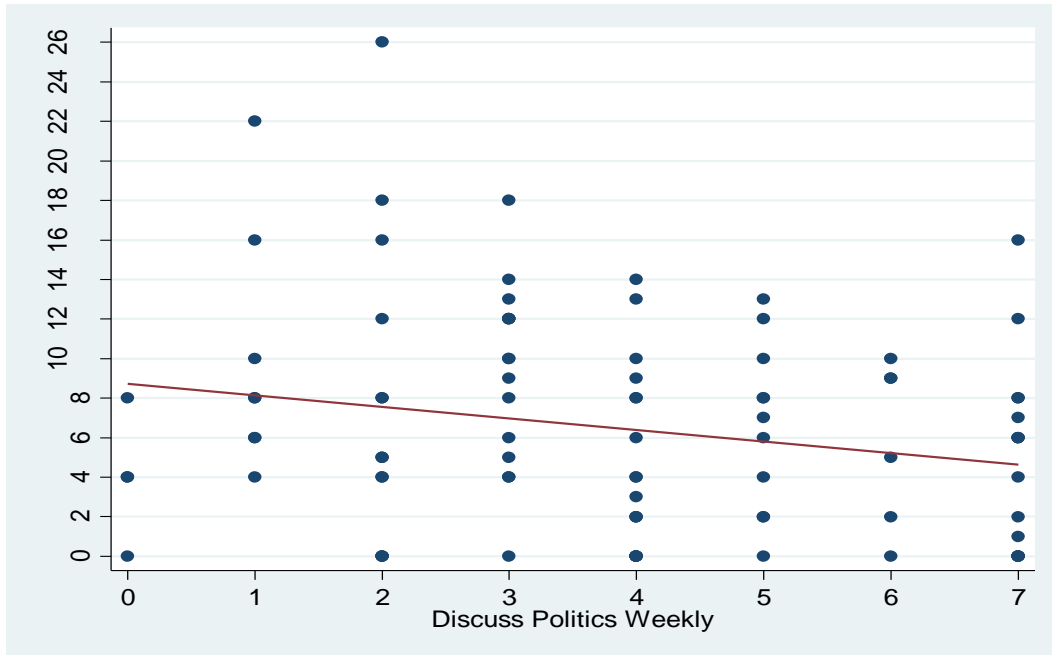


Figure 1: Discuss Weekly Impact on Overall Preference Change

agreement with low political discussion and high preference change. This finding corroborates that, regardless of the *condition* variable, participants who discuss politics more were more likely to have constrained preferences and therefore less likely to change their post-test rankings. This alternative effect on the model attests to an earlier deliberative study which finds that “individuals with high levels of prior political conversation... have more crystallized opinions ready and waiting to be vocalized” (Dutwin 2003). This finding will be addressed later in the Further Analysis section.

Hypothesis 2

Results of the H2 tests show significant results as well. Table 1 represents summary statistics that initially verify the discrepancy between participant’s pre and post preferences when only considering those preferences brought up in deliberation. Immediately of note here is the larger mean in the post-test group. This offers evidence in favor of H2 since the hypothesis

Table 4: Hypothesis 2 Summary Statistics

<u>Variable</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Standard Deviation</u>	<u>Minimum value</u>	<u>Maximum value</u>
Post-test value	11	3.135	-2	15
Pre-test value	8.646	3.681	0	15

suggests that preference change will show increase in the post-test variable. Further analysis of variance shown in Table 5 displays more in favor of H2.¹⁷ Here the data shows a significant F-value at the .001 level, offering overwhelming data to support the hypothesis. Within this data there are two areas of note: the F-value and the adjusted R-squared value. First, the F-value significance is at the .001 level, showing overwhelming significance for the model and supporting that participants increased preference rankings in the direction of preferences discussed in deliberations. Therefore, the null hypothesis that *participants involved in deliberation will rank the agenda preferences that were discussed in deliberation equally or decreasingly less in their post-deliberation questionnaires than in their pre-deliberation questionnaires* can be rejected with confidence.

Further evidence from Figure 2 shows the increasing slope addressing the post-deliberative preferences that coincide with group discussion. Of interest in Figure 2 is the fact that the slope does not intercept near the zero x-axis. The intercept is actually above 5, meaning

¹⁷ The same control variables listed in the first model were added to this model (including *discuss weekly*). None displayed significant effects on the dependent variable, and did not change the significance of the primary results.

Table 5: Hypothesis 2 Analysis of Variance

<u>Source</u>	<u>Sum of Squares*</u>	<u>Degree of Freedom</u>	<u>Mean Sum of Squares</u>	<u>F-value</u>
Model	245	1	245	51.91**
Error	245	46	5.326	
Total	217	47	4.719	

*Adjusted R-squared = .52

**P-value < .001

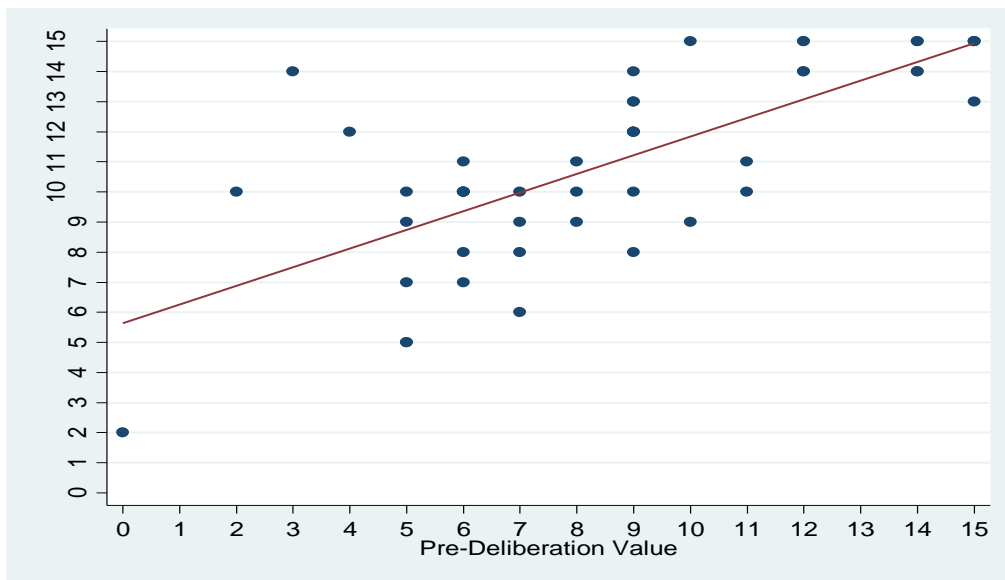


Figure 2: Pre-Deliberation Impact on Post-Deliberation

that participants who had no preferences ranked which were discussed in deliberation would have a predicted post-deliberation preference ranking value of above five. If the intercept were to be at or below zero then we would be hard pressed to uphold the hypothesis based on a reverse direction of participants values diverting away from preferences discussed in deliberation.

Hypothesis 3

Results of the H3 tests show differing results according to the hypothesis. Table 6 regression statistics show no significant effect when measuring participant’s openness to

Table 6: Hypothesis 3 Model 1 Regression

<u>Source</u>	<u>Coefficient</u>	<u>Standard Error</u>	<u>95% Confidence Interval</u>	<u>Prob > F</u>
Model 1DV- <i>Overall preference ranking change*</i>	12.593	2.394	7.78 to 17.41	.200**
IV- <i>Process openness</i>	-1.033	.794	-2.630 to .565	

*Adjusted R-squared = .0355

** not significant

deliberation on the *overall preference ranking change* variable (model 1). This suggests that openness/constraint cannot be considered a predictor of *overall preference ranking change*.

Table 7 shows some significance when the regression describes only those preferences discussed in deliberation (model 2).¹⁸ This discrepancy in findings accounts for the difference in the dependent variables used in the model. Although they are similar, *overall preference ranking*

¹⁸ The same control variables listed in the first model were added to this model (including *discuss weekly*). None displayed significant effects on the dependent variable, and did not change the significance of the primary results.

change is not predicated on the *process openness* variable, while *deliberated preference rank change* is.

Table 7: Hypothesis 3 Model 2 Regression

<u>Source</u>	<u>Coefficient</u>	<u>Standard Error</u>	<u>95% Confidence Interval</u>	<u>Prob > F</u>
Model 2 DV- <i>Deliberation preference ranking change*</i>	4.435	1.107	2.207 to 6.662	.053**
IV- <i>Process openness</i>	-.729	.367	-1.467 to .009	

*Adjusted R-squared = .059

** significant at .10 level

The difference in these two variables is that those participants who remained open to the deliberative process were more likely to change their preferences towards those preferences discussed during deliberation. On the other hand, there is no significant data to show that participants who were open to the deliberative process changed their overall preferences increasingly more (or less) than those participants who remained constrained towards the process. In this instance the hypothesis can be partially retained. Preference change increases with openness to the deliberative process, but the change is only significant when considering

those preferences discussed during deliberation. In this case, there remains the possibility of persuasion based on those constrained participants.

Further Analysis

A further question concerning the third hypothesis is whether those issues discussed during deliberation are increasingly from those participants who are more constrained participants. In other words, are the issues being discussed during deliberation trend toward those of the constrained participants? Any significant finding here would suggest that constrained participants preferences are being discussed more. This may be the case, as Dutwin found that constrained individuals “have crystallized opinions ready and waiting to be vocalized” (2003, 258). But, if group cohesiveness is a result of the lack of divisive rules (debate and consensus), then there should be no significant difference to show. A simple regression using *process openness* as an independent variable and *pre-test value* as the dependent variable found no significant results to back this assertion up.¹⁹

Another aspect of this question is whether those same constrained participants determine the direction of preference change. In other words, are the constrained participants persuading others in the group towards their preferences (Barabas 2004; Sanders 1997)? Results here should indicate significance if Barabas is correct. But, similar to the previous question, because the rules support group cohesiveness, there should be no significant results found. Similar to the previous finding, a simple regression using *process openness* as an independent variable and *post-test value* as the dependent variable found no significant results to support this assertion.²⁰

One finding of note that was produced from the H1 model is that participants who discussed politics more on a weekly basis also were less likely to change their agenda

¹⁹ Probability > F = .466

²⁰ Probability > F = .352

preferences. This finding is in keeping with an earlier study which demonstrates that high levels of political communication constrain a person's beliefs (Dutwin 2003). Dutwin found that political conversation plays a large role in influencing others during deliberation, eliciting an interesting question in this specific study—if participants who discuss politics more are less likely to change their preferences, then are the participants that are open to the deliberative process (found in the second H3 model) likely to change their preferences towards those who often discuss politics or display superior rhetorical skills?

A task of coding such a hypothesis would unquestionably be daunting and tedious, but it is worth the effort to look at this proposition in a qualitative manner. First, there seem to be two questions here: (1) Do those constrained participants who discuss politics more often tend to control the deliberation with their preferences? (2) Are others who are less constrained and therefore more open to the deliberative process more likely to follow the persuasion from those less constrained?

It would seem inherent that participants who discussed politics more on a weekly basis would show some statistical significance when calculating how many of their pre-deliberation preference rankings were actually discussed. Actually, a simple regression using the *pre-deliberation value* as the dependent variable and *discuss weekly* as the independent variable shows no significance in any direction and no reliable causal statistic.²¹ So what exactly is going on here?

It would be relevant to this analysis to examine in-depth a specific example from the deliberative groups. This example is from group three, which was a smaller group of seven participants. This group stood apart from the others for several reasons: (1) four of the participants ranked in the top six of all treatment group participants with regards to *deliberation*

²¹ Probability > F = .64

preference ranking change; in other words, they changes their preferences according to what was discussed in deliberation; (2) both participants with the lowest preference change and the highest preference change were included in this group; (3) there were only four preferences discussed in this group (the fewest of any group); (4) this group was randomly comprised (as were all groups), but consisted of no participants who describing themselves as democrats or liberals on any scale.²² The four preferences discussed in this group were: education, terrorism/national defense, social security, and ethics reform.

Further analysis of group three reveals that those participants who gained the most from the deliberation (based on the *process openness* variable) changed their preferences to fit the discussion. But, it was precisely these three participants who spoke little or none at all, even when given the opportunity. The other four participants dominated the discussion, voicing their preferences clearly and often agreeing with each other. The two participants with the least amount of political *discussion weekly* eventually agreed with the deliberated preferences in their post-rankings.

There seemed to be a few overriding themes that lead to this group representing the highest as well as the lowest preference changes as the other five. The group was small; and comprised of fairly similar belief structures—evident during the deliberation and within the data analysis (ideology and party identification). Also, certain participants were both open to the deliberative process and yet lacked much experience with political discussion (*discuss weekly*), and generally failed to assert their preferences in the deliberation. The two participants who best fit this mold both listed health care as their number one priority, yet discussion or mention of this never occurred. One dismissed its importance totally by not ranking it in the post-deliberation test, while the other lowered the health care ranking to fourth on their list.

²² This according to questions 2 & 3 found in Appendix A

Finally, the participants who did the largest amount of speaking were articulate, discussed politics on a regular basis, and seemed comfortable with the group similarities. One participant articulated his preference for social security agenda convincingly: “Social security is like the third rail of politics...like the third rail on a train track...you don’t touch that.” His descriptive explanation of his fifth most important preference didn’t bring about him changing this ranking post-deliberation, but it did influence two others to rank social security as their number one preferences post-deliberation (where it had previously not been ranked by either).

Findings from Dutwin (2003) and this experiment suggest that participants who discuss politics on a regular basis have constrained preferences. There seems to be several reasons found within this deliberative experiment that should be considered causes for this constraint: participants who discuss politics frequently do so with others who have similar beliefs; participants who discuss politics frequently have already deliberated and articulated their preferences with others, and are more aware of what these preferences are; participants who discuss politics frequently may be more knowledgeable and persuasive when discussing their preferences (Barabas 2004).

CONCLUSION

D. M. Ryfe presented four mechanisms for successful deliberations: (1) a set of rules to abide by; (2) involves culture and personal experience when discussions are framed; (3) proper information and leadership when organizing and producing the deliberation; (4) people must believe that the deliberative process has valuable meaning in order to become motivated about the process (2005, 63-64). Given this criteria, these agenda preference deliberations have succeeded. Clear rules for the participants and moderator were upheld, including no policy alternative debate and no required consensus. In certain analysis, the lack of debate or consensus afforded group cohesiveness. Secondly, a successful moderator goal was to generate discussion from participant's personal experiences. Also, all deliberation rules were maintained. Thirdly, informational requirements were not necessary due to the nature of the deliberations. Finally, it has been concluded that participants who were open to the deliberation used the process to reconsider their preferences.

Deliberative democracy can further use this pilot experiment to begin involving the public more in the agenda process. Specifically, similar experiments should be created that not only investigate more individual variables within such deliberations, but offer aggregate result that are meant to inform policymakers, political campaigns, and the media on various levels (Ryfe 2005). As stated earlier, such deliberations can substantially leave behind a long list of problematic concerns that easily arise within policy outcome deliberations: informational requirements (Zaller 1992), motivational deficits (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2002), apprehension towards confrontation (Rosenburg 2007; Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2002), rational and rhetorical capabilities (Sanders 1997), emotional affect (Rosenburg 2007), limitations of

consensus (Rosenburg 2007; Ryfe 2005), and divisiveness caused by debate (Knight and Johnson 1994). This experiment and research has proven this.

There are benefits for deliberative researchers, the public, policymakers, political campaigns, the media, and democracy itself for utilizing agenda preference deliberations: they can serve as a better starting point and produce better results than policy alternative deliberations; they can provide a new outlet for a public voice in the government agenda; they can help to legitimize the agenda setting process by informing elected officials, political campaigns, and the media what issues the public would prefer to be on the government agenda.

Such deliberations assure that policymakers and political campaigns have better means for direct public input into what issues policymakers should be addressing, and the public would take better notice when government agendas and policymaking strayed away from these agenda guidelines. Such deliberations offer policymakers a different perspective than opinion polls and votes based on campaign debates which, more often than not, consider pre-determined issue priorities and policy alternatives. Agenda preference deliberations show the government what the public views as top priorities after careful consideration and deliberation of all agenda possibilities. Such deliberations can give added legitimacy to American democracy.

There are still areas left open from this study to be addressed in the near future. Research should look further to determine what individual characteristics are most common within participants who are highly open or highly contemptuous towards the deliberative process. Determining how differing levels of political discussion in participants affects the individual participant, other participants, and the group overall would benefit deliberative research as well. Also, to what extent are characteristics of refined rhetoric, political sophistication, and prior

political discussion used to persuade other participants; and, are such participants themselves constrained towards the deliberative process?

Future studies could also look into the effect of internal deliberation on agenda preference change. It could be said that a portion of the change in the control groups who didn't experience deliberation actually altered their post-test preferences because they were offered the chance to re-think their opinions and re-establish their agenda preferences. How much of this change is a matter of simple memory lapse or volatile preferences, and how much is a matter of internal deliberation that results in actual preference restructuring?

Additionally, this deliberative model could be used by others as a mechanism to use prior to policy alternative deliberations: that preference collaboration without debate can lead to group cohesiveness and motivation, as participants realize that they were the ones generating the deliberation issues—not some unknown or outside source.

But, perhaps the most important area left to discover by this research is to actually construct public agenda deliberations that speak to all government levels and serve the purpose of informing officials, politicians, and the media of the public's agenda preferences. This is the most important reason for conducting this experiment. It represents a pilot study on the benefits of agenda preference deliberations, and is meant to offer deliberative democracy research a fresh substitute to policy alternative deliberations.

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APPENDIX A: PRE AND POST-TEST QUESTIONNAIRES

Pre-Test

1. Please list, in order of your preference, what items you believe should be the top priority items of our national government's policymakers in 2010. (1 through 5 listing, fill-in-the-black)
2. I consider myself to be a: (1, Republican; 2, Democrat; 3, Independent; 4, Something Else)
3. I consider myself to be a: (1, Strong Conservative; 1, Moderate Conservative; 3, Neither; 4, Moderate Liberal; 5, Strong Liberal)
4. I vote in political elections: (1, Always; 2, Often; 3, Sometimes; 4, Not very often; 5, Not at all)
5. I participate in political activities, such as attending campaign events, volunteering in a campaign, writing letters to elected officials, displaying a politician's yard sign or bumper sticker, donating money to campaigns, or other forms of political activity: (1, Often; 2, Sometimes; 3, Not very often; 4, Never)
6. My interest in politics is: (1, Very interested; 2, Somewhat interested; 3, Not very interested; 4, Not at all interested)
7. I discuss politics with others: (1, Often; 2, Sometimes; 3, Not very often; 4, Not at all)
8. During a typical week, how many days do you talk about politics with family or friends? (fill-in-the-blank)
9. What is your age? (fill-in-the-blank)
10. What gender are you? (fill-in-the-blank)
11. What is your race/ethnicity? (fill-in-the-blank)

Post-Test

1. Please list, in order of your preference, what items you believe should be the top priority items of our national government's policymakers in 2010. (1 through 5 listing, fill-in-the-black)
2. Has participating in this experimental process changed your views about the government's agenda? (1, Yes, very much so; 2, Yes, somewhat; 3, Yes, but very little; 4, No)

APPENDIX B: DELIBERATION—MODERATOR AND PARTICIPANT INSTRUCTIONS

Instructions to Participants

1. Open up the deliberation by asking participants to discuss what they consider should be the government's top priorities in 2010.
2. Explain that the deliberation is not a debate concerning issue or policy alternatives or outcomes. (If such occurs, immediately remind the participant/s that the discussion involves the government agenda and not policy alternatives. Debate concerning the importance of issues or agendas is acceptable.)
3. Explain that everyone has an equal opportunity to speak their preferences. (The moderator will maintain that participants do not take over the deliberation by speaking too long.)

Moderator Instructions

1. There is no requirement of consensus. Therefore, the moderator will at no point ask for group agreement or preference ranking order at any point. If the group decides to come to some agreement or consensus, this is acceptable provided the moderator did not induce this consensus.
2. There is no time limit for deliberation. The moderator should conduct the deliberation as long as participants are discussing their preferences.
3. The moderator should look for deliberations to progress into three areas:
 - A. Preferences that may be perceived as being of similar importance to the group, as well as the general public.
 - B. Preferences that may have been overlooked by individuals, the group, the public, or the government.
 - C. Preferences that are specifically important to individuals because of personal experience.

If the deliberation hasn't evolved into each of these areas to some extent, the moderator should progress the deliberation by asking the group to question and discuss any of the three above areas that have not been addressed.

APPENDIX C: AGGREGATE AGENDA PREFERENCE RESULTS (POST-TEST)

Table 8: Treatment versus Control Group Aggregate Preferences (Top Ten)*

Treatment Group Preferences	Ranking Values	Control Group Preferences	Ranking Values
education	119	health care/insurance	129
health care/health insurance	105	military/war/defense/security/terrorism	128
military/war/defense/security/terrorism	101	economy/recession	101
economy	101	education	76
taxes/debt/financial reform	93	taxes/debt/budget	62
jobs/unemployment	31	foreign relations/aid/affairs/policy/ international relations	47
foreign relations/policy/aid/affairs/ international relations	31	jobs/unemployment	21
social security	29	social security	19
energy/gas prices	19	abortion	19
immigration/border control	15	civil rights/gay rights/ women's rights/equality	18

* Values are calculated using the post-test scale of the H1 dependent variable (highest ranks are scored as five, whereas lowest ranks are scored as one).

VITA

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