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THE KAPOSVÁR DELIBERATIVE POLL: CONSIDERED OPINIONS ON UNEMPLOYMENT

Deliberative Polling attempts to show what the public would think about an issue under good conditions. These conditions include exposure to accurate and balanced information and discussions with heterogeneous others in which the participants consider (and feel free to express) differing points of view. An ordinary poll reflects “top of the head” reactions to sound bites and headlines. A Deliberative Poll (DP) captures more considered opinions based on much greater thought, information, and discussion.

The root of deliberation is “weighing.” The participants in a DP weigh competing arguments for and against policy alternatives, and then express their views in confidential questionnaires. The latter protect the expression of opinion from social pressures, including any socially-driven pressure toward consensus. It would be difficult-to-impossible to achieve this degree of even-handed, thoughtful weighing in the whole population, but it can be approached in a scientifically and transparently recruited, transparently deliberating representative microcosm.

That is the strategy of Deliberative Polling. The process begins with a definition of the subject and the development of a briefing document, supervised by an advisory committee of stakeholders representing different points of view. Based largely on this briefing document, a questionnaire is developed to assess the state of opinion and knowledge, both before and after the deliberative process. A representative sample of the population is surveyed, then invited to participate in deliberations which usually last a day or two or a weekend. Respondents who accept the invitation can be compared both attitudinally and demographically with those who do not. Ideally, the microcosm is representative both attitudinally and demographically of the broader population.

The process is, first of all, an alternative to the conventional public opinion poll. Most people know, think, and talk very little about most policy issues – and, when they do talk about them, tend to talk to others like themselves, from similar social backgrounds with similar views. The rise of the internet and other new forms of communication may be heightening this sort of selective exposure. It is easy to concentrate on websites or cable channels one finds congenial. As Cass Sunstein has argued (Sunstein 2007), we may be moving from a “daily we” (a shared public sphere where we are all at least aware of some of the same issues) to a “daily me” (a term coined by Negroponte 1995).

Deliberative Polling helps a representative microcosm overcome these shortcomings. As compared to ordinary polls, it expresses the public’s more considered opinions. If, normatively, democracy involves some connection between the public will and public policy, policymakers,

the media and citizens themselves should be interested in a representation of a more “authentic” public will – one that overcomes such obvious defects as inattention, ignorance, and one-sided reflection. Indeed, processes of this kind, as they are increasingly tried and improved, may play a role in actual policy making – as some Deliberative Polls already have. For more on this account of deliberative democracy, see Fishkin (1997, 2009) and Fishkin and Luskin (2005). For more on the applications of Deliberative Polling, see, for example, Luskin, Fishkin and Jowell (2002); Farrar, Fishkin, Green, Luskin, List, and Paluck (2006); Fishkin, He, Luskin, and Siu (2006); as well as the numerous other papers and reports at <http://cdd.stanford.edu>.

The Kaposvár region is especially suited to a deliberation on unemployment policy due to a high unemployment rate. In the year preceding the DP, it was 17% in the region (according to the briefing document for the project); far higher than the already high Hungarian national average of 10%.

The Kaposvár DP applies Deliberative Polling in a novel context, one of political and economic transition. Hungary has moved over the past few decades from authoritarianism to democracy and from state socialism to a market economy but the former system still lingers on in the memories, attitudes, and perceptions of many older Hungarians. Those memories, attitudes, and perceptions affect the debates on issues concerning the role of government in the economy, including policies to deal with unemployment. The Kaposvár DP on unemployment policy thus involves some fundamental issues about the relative roles of the state and the market. As the briefing document noted:

“For us, unemployment had been unknown for decades in the past regime. The Constitution defined work as a right and an obligation. Not working was illegal... Systemic changes and privatization led to the dissolution of great industrial plants (and agricultural cooperatives) and the number of ‘inefficient’ jobs decreased. For many this meant growing uncertainty and the threat of unemployment.”

For many people, by the time of this DP, unemployment had graduated from a threat to reality (and remained a threat for still more). Yet the benefits of the market had also brought greater prosperity and consumer choice than anything experienced under the old system. As the old government guarantees of employment and the old industries disappeared, what mix of government and market, of welfare state and individual responsibility would be most appropriate? What should be done to put people back to work and give them opportunities, over both the short and long term? These are the sorts of questions that this Hungarian DP posed, for a region particularly beset by unemployment.

SAMPLING, RECRUITMENT, AND REPRESENTATIVENESS

Initially, a random sample of 1,514 from the Kaposvár region (Small Area) was interviewed and invited to participate in the deliberations. The questionnaire focused on employment and job creation but also included questions about the European Union, demographics, and other background variables. Of the 1,514 sampled, 435 expressed sufficient interest to be sent briefing materials and details about the event. On the weekend of 21–22 June, 2008, 108 of them appeared for a two day deliberation at Kaposvár University.

The sample was broadly representative. Demographically, the participants looked very much like the non-participants (interviewees who did not attend the deliberations). There were no significant differences in mean age (although the very youngest cohort was slightly under-

represented), marital status (except for the number who were divorced), educational level, and kind of employment (skilled labor, semi-skilled, etc). Fewer participants than nonparticipants worked in the private sector and lived in villages (especially impoverished ones) and more of them were, or had been, unemployed and had some experience with job retraining.

Table 1 Socio-demographic Representativeness

Variable	Entire Sample	Participants	Non-Participants	χ^2 (or t)	p-value
Age (in years)	(N=1,514)	(N=108)	(N=1,406)		
	50.8	53.2	50.6	1.502	.133
Gender	(N=1,514)	(N=108)	(N=1,406)		
Male	43.2	48.2	42.8	1.078	.161
Marital Status	(N=1,514)	(N=108)	(N=1,406)		
Single	28.5%	23.1%	28.9%	1.654	.198
Married	60.6%	57.4%	60.8%	0.486	.486
Divorced	10.9%	19.4%	10.2%	8.747	.003
Education level	(N=1,514)	(N=108)	(N=1,406)	χ^2	χ^2
did not attend school	0.4%	0.0%	0.3%	3.976	.859
less than 8 yrs primary school	5.4%	2.8%	5.6%		
8 yrs primary school	21.4%	20.4%	21.5%		
industrial/trade school	28.5%	31.5%	28.2%		
industrial/trade school + high school diploma	4.8%	2.8%	4.9%		
vocational secondary school, secondary engineering school graduation	16.5%	15.7%	16.6%		
high school diploma	10.7%	13.0%	10.5%		
college diploma	9.0%	10.2%	9.0%		
university diploma	3.4%	3.7%	3.4%		
Are you at present ...?	(N=1,513)	(N=108)	(N=1,405)		
employee	34.0%	25.0%	34.7%	4.232	.040
entrepreneur, work in your own business	4.8%	1.9%	5.1%	2.239	.135
doing casual work	0.8%	0.9%	0.8%	.026	.872
unemployed	9.8%	18.5%	9.2%	9.848	.002
pensioner	40.1%	48.1%	39.5%	3.121	.077
on maternity leave	5.3%	3.7%	5.4%	.583	.445
student	3.8%	1.9%	3.9%	1.177	.278
other	1.3%	0.0%	1.4%	1.558	.212

Attitudinally, too, the participants, before deliberating, looked like the non-participants. They differed only insignificantly on 50 out of the 67 attitude items, including many of the most central. For example, there were no significant differences recorded on whether industries should be protected from foreign competition, whether providing jobs is an individual or a government responsibility, whether unemployment is inevitable or must be avoided at all costs, and whether the government should spend more on education, health care and pensions even if this means increasing taxes.

There were a few statistically significant differences. The participants were somewhat more sceptical that giving employers more freedom to hire and fire would create economic growth or increase jobs, somewhat more sympathetic to the notion of giving benefits to everyone rather than just to those who worked for them, and more supportive of certain measures for dealing with unemployment, including training support, communal work, and support for self-employment. Generally, these differences were small. See the Appendix for more details.

KNOWLEDGE GAIN

Participants were asked nine knowledge questions on first contact (T1), on arrival to the deliberations (T2) and at the end of the deliberations (T3). Four had textual response categories and five had numerical ones. The textual questions included such items as “which area settlement has the highest or lowest unemployment rate?” and “what industry in the area provides the majority of employees?” The numerical questions section asked questions such as “what is the percentage of unemployed in Somogy receiving regular social aid?” and “what is the rate of unemployment rate in both Hungary and in the EU?”

Table 2 Knowledge Gains

	Type	T1	T2	T3	T2-T1	P	T3-T2	p	T3-T1	p
Means										
All Items		29.6	31.6	36.7	2.0	.347	5.1	.003	7.1	.004
Numerical Items		23.0	22.6	26.1	-0.4	.874	3.5	.084	3.1	.230
Textual Items		38.0	42.8	50.0	4.9	.145	7.2	.004	12.1	.001

Note: T1, T2, and T3 denote the initial, arrival, and post-event surveys, respectively. For question type, T denotes questions with textual response categories, N questions with numerical ones. N=108.

Across all nine items, the participants averaged answering 7.1% questions more correctly after deliberation. On some of the individual items, the gains were larger. After deliberating, 22% more of the participants knew which settlement had the highest unemployment rate and 10% more know which industry employed the majority of workers. Overall, the 7.1% average is both statistically and substantively significant, though somewhat smaller than findings from most DPs. The reason, we suspect, is our greater-than-usual reliance in this case on items with numerical response categories. Facts consisting of numbers are doubtless harder to remember than facts consisting of concepts. Thus the average gain on the four items with textual response categories is 12.1% which is very typical of the results of other DPs, while the average gain on the five items with numerical response categories is only 3.1%.

POLICY ATTITUDES

The considered opinions at the end of the process involved some dramatic changes of view. Most notably, participants became more favourably-inclined towards market solutions. They gave increased support to foreign trade. On a scale running from “certain industries should be protected against

foreign competition as much as possible” (0) to the “market should be made as open as possible” (1), they moved from roughly the midpoint (.49) to a position (.636) distinctly on the open market side. They also came to see employment as more of an individual responsibility. On a scale ranging from “finding a job is one’s own responsibility” (0) to “providing jobs for all citizens is the government’s responsibility” (1), they moved from slightly favoring the latter (.531) to distinctly favoring the former (.381). Similarly, they became more willing to tolerate some degree of unemployment. On a scale from having to accept some degree of unemployment (0) to avoiding it “at any cost,” the participants moved from leaning toward avoiding it any cost (.551) to leaning toward tolerating it (.417). They also increased their agreement (from .588 to .703 on a 0-1 scale) with the statement that the unemployed “don’t help themselves but expect everything from society.”

Table 3 Policy attitudes (T1 vs. T3)

Question	N	T1	T3	T3-T1	p
Q1. Some people think that certain industries should be protected against foreign competition as much as possible, at point 1. Other people think that market should be made as open as possible, at point 7. (0=protected)	102	0.490	0.636	0.145	0.002
Q13. Some people think that allowances, aids and benefits should be paid only to those who work for them, at point 1. Other people think that people who can’t work due to vis maiors should also be taken care of, at point 7. (0=only those who work for them)	111	0.644	0.797	0.153	0.000
Q17. Some people think that, given the current economic situation, unemployment can’t be totally avoided and we need to accept it, at point 1. Other people think that unemployment should be avoided at any cost, at point 7. (0=can’t be avoided)	112	0.551	0.417	-0.134	0.008
Q19. Some people think the government should decrease taxes even if this means less funding for education, health care and pensions, at point 1. Other people think that the government should spend more on education, health care and pensions even if this means increasing taxes, at point 7. (0=decrease taxes)	101	0.413	0.521	0.109	0.020

At the same time, the participants also increased their support for guarantees to protect the most vulnerable when markets fail to provide. On a question asking whether “allowances aids and benefits” should be paid only to those who work for them or should also go to those who could not work, support for including everyone increased from .644 to .797. Similarly, on a scale running from “the government should decrease taxes even if this means less funding for education, health care and pensions” (0) and “the government should spend more on education, health care and pensions even if this means increasing taxes” (1), the participants moved from a position closer to the former (.413) to one roughly in the middle (.521).

Overall, these attitude changes are of two arguably complementary sorts: toward individual responsibility within a market system shorn of protectionism but also toward a safety net for those who need it, paid for by higher taxes, if necessary. The combination is a nuanced view of the role government should play in the market.

EVALUATION OF THE EVENT

The majority of participants felt (half very strongly and about one-third somewhat) that they learned about people very different from themselves. The majority also felt that all the important aspects of the problems were discussed during the small group meetings. The moderators

conducted the discussions properly according to opinions and they could achieve that members participated relatively equally in discussions. However, only half of the participants thought that moderators tried to make sure that opposing arguments were considered and roughly one-third denied this had happened. Basically this may mean two things: firstly, that controversial topics were not stressed by moderators. Secondly, that a mentionable proportion of participants disliked controversies as such. Controversies were associated with nasty debates and people were less open towards this type of discussion than towards social heterogeneity of the small groups.

As for technicalities, the length of small group and plenary sessions were thought to be sufficient by the vast majority. The majority felt that the briefing material was clear and the majority declared that they had read it (a qualification is needed in this respect since from the breakdown it turns out that some of the few who hadn't read the entire briefing material declared that it was nonetheless clear for them). Furthermore, the changes evidenced between T1 and T2 were less important than between T1 and T3.

In terms of what skills or knowledge were improved by the event, three-quarters of participants mentioned increased motivation to participate actively in public debates and for roughly more than two-thirds it also served towards better communication with other people and better understanding of their attitudes and behavior. A lesser number (although more than three out of five participants) mentioned that the event served to increase understanding of the public debate on employment or to improve their knowledge on employment issues or on the EU. The general impression is that the majority felt the event useful in all respects. Thus the subjective evaluation of knowledge gain may have even exceeded real growth of knowledge. But, besides the cognitive aspects, it is more important that the event produced positive emotional impacts as well. Four out of five participants experienced feelings of solidarity and felt that small group discussions decreased tensions.

Four out of five participants felt that the most important motivating factor in their participation was learning more about employment issues, but for two out of three it was also fascinating to be able to defend their views and to meet experts and other people in the region. Financial incentives proved to be the least motivation, strongly attracting only two out of five people. For the vast majority, small groups, plenary sessions and social events proved to be equally interesting.

We can investigate the cognitive and affective evaluations of the event in the light of participant self-evaluation: namely whether they were active or rather passive during the meeting. Those who evaluated themselves positively in over-average terms on solidarity, communication and activity tended to evaluate the event itself in more positive terms. Those who described themselves as being over-averagely aggressive did not think that the deliberative weekend was so useful.

CONCLUSION

In a region suffering high levels of unemployment, it is noteworthy that deliberation could increase the public's acceptance of unprotected free trade, individual responsibility for jobs, and toleration of some level of unemployment. In a society in which guarantees of a job had previously been a hallmark of public policy, these movements also show the effect of the thought processes, learning, and discussion which took place during the deliberative weekend and the period between the initial interview and the deliberations. On this evidence, public deliberation appears to serve a useful purpose in societies which are consolidating the dual transitions from state socialism and authoritarianism to market and democracy. Those transitions pose difficult problems, as we have seen in the case of unemployment, and people are unlikely to accept

initially unpopular but plausible alternatives unless they see that there are tradeoffs—that other alternatives entail difficulties of their own.

This project shows that a DP can successfully be conducted in Hungary, even on a difficult issue like unemployment. The participants were representative. They became demonstrably more informed. They significantly changed their views. This exercise has also served to pilot a form of public consultation that can contribute not just to the study of public opinion but to the policy process.

This hope is not utopian. In various parts of the world, Deliberative Polling has already provided important input to actual decision processes. In Texas, eight DPs held in various parts of the state were part of a regulatory process, “Integrated Resource Planning”, in which electric utilities made decisions on energy choices. The populations grappled with their energy priorities and the utilities filed plans with the Public Utility Commission based on the results. The eight plans and some later decisions by the legislature based on this data led to Texas becoming the leading state in wind power in the US in 2007. More recently, the state of Vermont conducted a statewide DP on “Vermont’s Energy Future,” and shifted resources toward wind power in response to the sample’s movement in that direction. In China, Zeguo Township has been convening yearly DPs to make decisions about budget and infrastructure. Recently it has opened up its entire budget to the DP process with the Local People’s Congress observing the deliberations, assessing the results and making adjustments in the budget accordingly. In Rome, the Regione Lazio convened a statewide DP to consider health care costs in its budget crisis and, based on the DP, cut the number of hospital beds and redistributed those resources to other forms of medical care. In these and other cases, the informed and representative views of the public have become a visible input to the policy process and in effect demonstrated the viability of more deliberative democracy based on a combination of political equality and deliberation.

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