

Utrecht University

Bachelor Thesis

Mini-publics' effect on ideological polarization

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Polarized societies are said to present a challenge to western democracies. Ideological polarization (IP) within the electorate, based on severe divergence on certain policy issues, makes it more difficult to find common ground on policy issues. When people are less willing to compromise, problems of governance occur. Since the deliberative turn in democratic theory, deliberative democrats have put forward the benefits of adding deliberative institutions, e.g. mini-publics, to the political system. According to them, deliberation can deliver more 'sophisticated, tolerant, and participative citizens' under certain conditions. This thesis wants to discover whether the positive effects of deliberation can also contribute to depolarization of society. Therefore, it sheds light on the relationship between deliberation and IP to investigate how mini-publics can affect the level of IP. Using an interdisciplinary approach to the question, this paper's approach is twofold. In the first step, I review empirical political science literature on case studies of citizens' assemblies, citizens' juries and deliberative polls with regard to the effects they have on participants' polarization levels. In a second step, I built on philosophical theory to employ a systems approach, assessing their deliberative context and exploring to what extent non-participants' IP can be affected by mini-publics too.

This thesis shows under which conditions mini-publics affect the level of IP of their members. I highlight that a larger member size and high diversity in perspectives benefit both the depolarization of participants and the external quality of mini-publics. The systemic approach demonstrates that mini-publics are linked to other deliberative systems but still cannot significantly affect the whole electorate's IP level. Additionally, the empirical analysis adds an important nuance for future studies of mini-publics. In fact, it highlights that mini-publics consist of two phases of which we should distinguish the effects. Both the information phase and the deliberation phase can have effects on their participants, so one needs to be careful which effects we associate with each phase.

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1. Introduction

The effect of polarization on the quality of democracy is a much debated issue. Polarized societies are said to present a challenge to western democracies. A functioning democracy which allows the management of competing interests in a society in an organized manner, requires a certain amount of consensus. However, increased ideological polarization (IP) within the electorate resulting from severe divergence on certain policy issues makes it more difficult to find common ground on policy issues. When people are less willing to cooperate and compromise in seeking shared solutions problems of governance occur. For example, gridlock, referring to the inability to implement effective policies, becomes more likely (McCoy et al., 2018; Munzert & Bauer, 2013). Other negative consequences of IP include the solidification of existing conflicting positions within the electorate as well as reduced social interaction among the disagreeing individuals. Against that background, the support for democratic institutions and the overall stability of the democratic system is under threat when IP rises (McCoy et al., 2018).

Since the ‘deliberative turn’ in democratic theory in the 1990s, a variety of deliberative designs have been discussed as possible additions to representative democracy and thereby improvements to the quality of democracy (Goodin & Dryzek, 2006). Deliberative democracy as a concept is based on the ideal of bringing people together to discuss political matters and then, on the basis of those discussions, deliberate on policy issues (Bächtiger et al., 2018). At its core, deliberation processes are meant to allow individuals to carefully ‘weigh the merits of competing arguments in discussion together’ (Fishkin 2009, p.33). As a result, it turns out that under certain conditions, deliberation can deliver more ‘sophisticated, tolerant, and participative citizens’ (Ryfe, 2005, p.49). Yet, researchers have not extensively investigated these structural conditions regarding their effect on IP. The underlying mechanism that this paper wants to shed light on is that group deliberation within an institution can create more or reduce the level of IP (Landemore & Mercier, 2010; Luskin et al., 2017).

Theoretically, the idea of deliberation, where the goal is to clarify the root of the matter when disagreeing through discussion or even achieve greater acceptance for opposing positions, seems to be strongly conflicting with the concept of IP. Hence, one might expect deliberative environments to counteract the negative effects of IP. So far, deliberative experiments have been reviewed mainly with regard to deliberation and its long term effects on participants (Van der Does & Jacquet, 2021) or the general relationship between deliberation and polarization (e.g. Grönlund et al., 2015). However, there is a gap in the literature when it comes to comparing specific deliberative institutional design and their effect on IP. This relationship needs further clarification. Hence, this paper wants to explore:

How does deliberation within different mini-publics affect the level of ideological polarization ?

Concretely, the focus will lie on ‘mini-publics’. These are deliberative institutional designs that are constituted of groups small enough to be genuinely deliberative while also being representative enough to be genuinely democratic (even though they rarely meet standards of statistical representativeness) (Goodin & Dryzek, 2006). Mini-publics have received a lot of academic attention recently and are in fact considered one of the defining developments in deliberative democratic theory (Ercan & Dryzek, 2015). Since many different structural forms of mini-publics exist, we need to examine them separately. Still, it holds for all of them that the dependent variable of IP represents the polarization of the participants (Russo et al., 2021), conceptualized on a left-right ideological dimension, essentially showing the

tendency of the electorate to diverge on preferences after deliberation. Employing an interdisciplinary approach this thesis divides the answers to the main research question into two sections and alongside the following two subquestions.

1. How do mini-publics affect the ideological polarization level of participating citizens?
2. To what extent can mini-publics affect the ideological polarization level of non-participating citizens?

In order to answer the first question, I use philosophical theory on deliberative democracy and mini-publics to illustrate the mechanisms through which I argue deliberation can impact polarization levels. Consequently, I forward a hypothesis under which conditions mini-publics can depolarize the participant group. Against that background, this paper reviews empirical studies on various deliberative experiments regarding their effects on participants. For the purpose of addressing the second subquestion this thesis builds a theoretical argument informed by the systemic turn in democratic theory to examine the systemic role of mini-publics.

The remainder of this paper is divided into five sections: First, I offer some theoretical background on the relevant concepts for this paper and their theoretical relationship (section two). In following section three, I explain the methodology, with an emphasis on the interdisciplinary aspect of this thesis. Section four analyses the different kinds of mini-publics with regard to their effect on polarization levels of participants and afterwards, explores the systemic context in which mini-publics take place to evaluate their depolarizing effects on non-participants. In the final section I discuss and integrate the results to answer the main research question.

2. Theoretical background

This section will proceed by defining IP and outline its potential undesirable consequences. Then, deliberation is defined to underline how it differs from mere discussion. Against that background, I present how deliberative approaches work in practice by highlighting their common features. In order to understand the expected effect of deliberation on IP, the theoretical relationship between the two concepts will be analysed. I forward my own conceptualization of depolarization by emphasizing three relevant structural conditions that relate mini-publics to IP.

In a second step the systemic approach will allow me to evaluate the role of mini-publics in the context of the wider political system and therefore make claims about the depolarization potential of mini-publics beyond their direct participants. Ergo, I forward a theoretical argument under which conditions mini-publics can possibly depolarize non-participants.

Ideological Polarization

In a broad sense, the concept of polarization can be defined as a clustering within the society that divides the population into sizable groups on opposite sides (Reiljan, 2020). This paper focuses on IP which captures the divergence of preferences of the electorate measured on the left-right ideological dimension (Russo et al., 2021). In other words, IP occurs when people move further apart in their opinions on policy issues or self placement on an ideological scale. When applying the commonly used distinction between the supply and the demand side polarisation (where supply-side polarisation refers to distances between

the political parties on the elite level, while demand-side polarisation reflects the divergence among the electorate (Ibid., 2021) this paper treats IP from a demand-side perspective since I focus on the polarization of preferences among the voters.

Based on the assumption that democracy as a system of governance requires a certain amount of consensus when managing competing interests, severe IP hinders society in reaching such consensus (McCoy et al., 2018; Munzert & Bauer, 2013). A first reason for why IP occurs and intensifies can be found when looking at behaviour. Social interaction tends to appear in homogenized groups mainly, which can result in greater distance between groups that are in disagreement. This in turn leads to decreased interaction with the disagreeing group and increased interaction with the like-minded group (McCoy et al., 2018)¹. Secondly, IP influences collective action within groups. In intergroup conflicts polarized individuals perceive positive-sum interests as zero-sum interests which disrupts collective efforts and reinforces mutually exclusive identities (Ibid, 2018). The consequences for democratic governability are significant: Reduced willingness to cooperate and find compromise as well as increased zero-sum perceptions cause an undesirable scenario in which democratic governments are either unable to implement effective policy decisions (e.g. gridlock) or the majority unilaterally imposes policies on the minority (Ibid, 2018).

Deliberation

Deliberation can be defined as weighing reasons for and against a course of action through communication in debate that encourages reflection on preferences, values and interests in a non-coercive way (Goodin, 2000; Mansbridge et al., 2010). Generally, the discussion aims at ‘producing reasonable, well-informed opinions in which participants are willing to revise preferences in light of discussion, new information, and claims made by fellow participants’ (Carpini et al. 2004, p. 318). Also, theorists agree on a certain set of regulative ideals of deliberative democracy (Mansbridge et al. 2010). The deliberation should theoretically be open to everyone affected by the decision. The participants are meant to have equal opportunity to influence the deliberation process, possess equal resources, and be protected by basic rights (e.g. freedom). Grounding one’s position based on reason is required and central to the concept.

Deliberation contains certain elements which distinguish it from mere discussion. Luskin et al. (2017) provide four aspects of deliberation which help us to understand the difference. Firstly, deliberation is substantive, meaning that participants exchange relevant information and arguments. Secondly, it is inclusive, so the information and arguments capture a whole range of different opinions and perspectives. Thirdly, participants in deliberation are responsive to one another and critically interact with each other. Lastly, participants are expected to be open-minded, allowing them to even-handedly reconsider their own policy attitudes. Overall, deliberation needs its participants to engage in ‘serious, open-minded, even-handed weighing-of-the-merits’ (Luskin et al., 2017, p.2).

Furthermore, deliberative democrats agree that deliberation involves not only exchanging arguments but internal processes of reflection based on these arguments too. In that case, deliberation must essentially also happen within the mind of each participant (Goodin, 2000).

¹ McCoy et al. (2018) use this dynamic to link IP to affective polarization. In their study, they highlight how IP creates patterns that lead to affective polarization. Linking deliberative democracy with affective polarization exceeds the scope of this paper but could be a topic for future investigation.

Deliberative designs

The large majority of naturally occurring discussions in our lives do not meet the outlined elements of deliberation. One example is participants in group discussions rarely interact critically with the whole range of different opinions on the table. Thus, we need to rely on deliberative designs that create the space for deliberation among citizens by organizing discussion settings which are meant to be much more deliberative than those in everyday life (Luskin et al., 2017).

Many different deliberative experiments have been conducted so far, varying in design, purpose, context and time frame (e.g. Farrell et al., 2013 or Grönlund et al., 2015) At their core, they all recognize the need for effective justification of positions, stress the pursuit of reciprocal understanding across different perspectives, value inclusion and reflection and reject coercive and deceptive use of language (Ercan & Dryzek, 2015). Before explaining the particular features that are said to influence IP we can overview the structural features common to most deliberative designs. In order to be called a mini-public, institutions must fulfill these criteria even though depending on the specific design some variations occur². Mini-publics included members selected at random (see criterion 5) but they are too limited in size to be representative of the whole electorate. Hence, the inquiry into the first research subquestion is restricted to the change in polarization levels of the participants. In fact, it is among these individuals where we can study the mechanism of how IP is impacted.

Table 1. Criteria that are common to all deliberative approaches (Farrell et al., 2013):

1. *The entity (jury, assembly, etc.) is established with a particular purpose in mind.*
2. *It is given a clearly defined agenda.*
3. *It is made clear to its members how their recommendations will be followed up on.*
4. *Its operation is time-delimited; after its work is completed it ceases to exist.*
5. *Its members are selected randomly: they are not elected, nor are they selected to represent different sectors.*³
6. *There is an important role for experts, not as participants, but rather as witnesses.*
7. *At the heart of the enterprise is deliberation – ‘the process by which individuals sincerely weigh the merits of competing arguments in discussions together’ (Fishkin, 2009, p. 33).*

Relationship deliberation & IP

If we trust the theoretical advocates of deliberative democracy, these instances of deliberation can have lasting effects on participants as well as effects on non-participants (Dryzek, 2010; Niemeyer, 2014; Smith and Wales, 1999). In order to understand the connection of how deliberation can affect IP, we need to establish the theoretical relationship between the two concepts. While mini-publics are not primarily designed to reduce IP, they might still have an effect since they are meant to result in greater acceptance

² The list presents defining features of mini-publics which are rather uncontroversial among proponents of deliberative approaches (Ercan & Dryzek, 2015; Farrell et al., 2013). The purpose of having a small set of features here is to give a concise overview. Certainly, one could add additional criteria, e.g. the role of moderators (see for discussion Landwehr, 2014) to this list but this would make the list increasingly vulnerable to criticism.

³ Some deliberative experiments use stratification to avoid having a uniform group. Thereby, they ensure viewpoint diversity (Smith & Wales, 1999).

for opposite opinions and stimulate opinion shifts (Dryzek et al., 2019; Farrel et al., 2013; Van der does & Jaquet, 2021). Additionally, Strandberg et al. (2019) have found evidence in their deliberative experiment which indicates that opinions depolarize, or at least not lead to further polarization as a consequence of participating in deliberative group discussions. On the other hand, some authors claim the opposite, arguing that deliberation can increase polarization (Sunstein, 2000; Sunstein, 2002). This begs the question: What incentivizes participants of a mini-public to reconsider their policy positions during a deliberation process and, as a result, become less polarized as a group?

I expect the mechanism during a deliberative experiment to be as follows: When participants are structurally incentivised to deliberate as accurately as possible, they will be enabled to reevaluate their pre-test standpoints, meaning they reconsider their positions. ‘Accuracy’ in this case refers to being motivated to come as close as possible to an objective evaluation of one’s own position. On the one hand, participants become better informed by considering relevant information and weighing the different arguments. Therefore, they can develop their own position more objectively. On the other hand, participants gain a greater understanding of other’s positions since they are confronted with different opinions on the matter during deliberation (Ryfe, 2005).

If participants succeed in deliberating accurately, the higher level of understanding of their own as well as other’s positions, should enable them to reduce the pre-test polarization of the group. In fact, obtaining an accurate conclusion based on deliberation opposes the idea of maintaining prior beliefs since otherwise deliberation would be pointless (Ryfe, 2005). Earlier conducted population based experiments have already indicated that in deliberative conditions groups become less extreme while absent deliberative conditions, members become more extreme (Grönlund et al., 2015). Therefore, the mini publics’ structures need to encourage individuals to deliberate as accurately as possible if they also want to depolarize.

In that light, Ryfe (2005) presents a detailed review of the literature on deliberative democracy and uses it to identify three structural conditions which motivate individuals to deliberate accurately: *Accountability, high stakes and diversity*. Firstly, accountability refers to external pressures which force individuals to justify their own positions in front of others. Experimental case studies have highlighted that in settings where the individuals have to discuss their judgments publicly people are on average more inclined to process information more objectively (Tetlock, 1983). I argue within mini-publics this can be achieved through plenary discussion settings and high transparency about its content. If these two aspects are fulfilled sufficiently, the deliberation is more likely to depolarize participants.

High stakes refers to the finding that the individual’s perception of consequences influences motivation to deliberate accurately (Taber et al., 2001). Applied to deliberative experiments it appears that the consequences thereof need to be direct and understandable, so participants invest more energy to get the decision right. For instance, direct consequences of a mini-public could entail that their policy recommendation is voted on by the legislative or at least that participants know what happens with the results they produce (which can also be tied back to the previous ‘transparency’ argument).

Lastly, a greater diversity of ideas within the deliberation group also serves as a motivational factor. According to Ryfe (2005) individuals that are confronted with different perspectives are inclined to be more open-minded, learn more from each other and engage in deeper consideration of issues. Importantly, this does not necessarily mean that individuals need to come from different socio-demographic backgrounds since their diversity in perspectives is sufficient for successful group deliberation. Therefore, the overall quality of the deliberation can be improved and, more importantly for this paper, the post-test polarization levels reduced.

With regard to the importance of diversity of viewpoints Sunstein (2000) makes a similar observation. In his empirical investigation of group polarization during deliberation he finds that ‘deliberation tends to move groups, and the individuals who compose them, toward a more extreme point in the direction indicated by their own pre deliberation judgments’ (Sunstein, 2000, p.1). In this case, Sunstein refers to like-minded groups leading each other to strong reinforcement of existing preferences. Based on the empirical regularity he finds, his explanation is twofold: Firstly, he refers to the limited pool of “persuasive arguments” in such groups and the argumentative path dependency which results from it. In fact, when people are hearing echoes of their own voices, more extreme positions become more likely. Secondly, he argues that people, based on the desire for social conformity, want to be perceived favorably by other members of the group. Therefore, the social pressures within the group tend to push individuals into agreeing with the dominant norm. In order to avoid these errors, deliberating groups should be appropriately heterogeneous and encompass a plurality of views (Sunstein, 2002)⁴.

Another argument in support of diversity of perspectives follows Landemore and Mercier’s (2010) application of the argumentative theory of reasoning to deliberative democracy. They argue that group deliberation generally reduces the likelihood of polarization by avoiding confirmation bias to occur. Confirmation bias is said to occur when individuals reason alone or in a group of like minded people, where little inclination to reconsider one’s own arguments exists. In that setting people will accumulate arguments for the side they already believe in, confirmation bias will run unchecked and even reinforce the initial beliefs of each other. In contrast, in a situation where individuals who disagree on preferences exchange arguments, what naturally happens is that a spectrum of arguments for each side is produced and these arguments are criticized by people who disagree with their conclusion (Landemore & Mercier, 2010). Therefore, confirmation biases of each individual can be balanced out and polarization prevented. A central assumption here is that people, once faced with strong enough arguments, are able to recognize the strength of these arguments and change their position accordingly (Landemore & Mercier, 2010).

Still, this does not imply that group deliberation rules out IP entirely since people can still be polarized as a result of strong value disagreement (e.g. one person highly valuing freedom versus another person valuing equality more). In sum, all of these ‘diversity’ arguments therefore result in the same, important implication for deliberative design choices. Mini-publics should contain people with a certain degree of heterogeneous views otherwise it can be expected that they result in higher voter polarization. When we think back to Table 1, we can identify very direct connections between the three earlier mentioned conditions and the common criteria of deliberative approaches. These can be utilized as entry points for the analysis later. Accountability seems to be reflected under the 7th criterion. Even though it is not very explicit based on Farrell’s description, it is at the core of the deliberation process where participants interact with each other and it becomes possible to analyse accountability. The third point describes the (possible) high stakes involved and thereby opens up an angle for further investigation. Point five illustrates the group composition and can serve as an entry point for the analysis of diversity within the mini-publics. Already, there seems to be a potential tension between random selection and ensuring viewpoint diversity. When the group is selected at random it can happen that they end up being similar individuals. It begs the question why many deliberative approaches use random selection regardless and not opt for a stratified selection. Stratification helps to avoid having a uniform group and ensure viewpoint diversity. However, the use of stratified random sampling is controversial, particularly when the number of participants is small because it produces selection problems (Smith & Wales, 1999)

⁴ Sunstein (2002) notes that it is difficult to specify appropriate heterogeneity, and the appropriate plurality of views, without making some antecedent judgments about the substantive question at issue.

In theory, random selection has multiple upsides (French & Laver, 2009). Firstly, it gives all citizens an equal chance of being selected. Secondly, it avoids manipulation of the composition of the deliberation. Thirdly, it guarantees that social groups are represented in proportion to their size. However in practice, random selection of deliberators is more complicated and creates challenges. Not all invitees agree to participate and the ones that agree do sometimes not show up to the experiment (Ibid, 2009). This threatens an equal representation of all relevant citizens since the group will be dominated by people who tend to be more interested in politics (Farrell et al., 2013) .

Deliberative systems

Suppose for a moment that a deliberative experiment meets the criteria that support accurate deliberation and as a consequence, the group depolarizes. In other words, one finds that deliberation within mini-publics has a positive effect (IP levels are reduced) on the polarization level of the participants. Even then it is yet unclear if these effects also apply to the democratic (deliberative) system as a whole. As the participants group constitutes only a very small part of voters, it is unclear to what extent the deliberation within mini-publics can affect the polarization levels of the whole electorate (referred to as the ‘problem of scale’ in deliberative democracy) (Mansbridge et al., 2012). Thus, in line with the second subquestion this paper uses a systemic approach of deliberative democracy to extend the analysis to the wider public.

The overall deliberative system consists of the many different locations for deliberation (for example political legislatures, old and new media, informal citizen gatherings, and also mini-publics etc.) taken together to form a complex whole (Dryzek et al., 2019; Mansbridge et al., 2012). One can think of various links between the different deliberative locations, for example how mini-publics offer policy recommendations to the legislature (see for example Farrell et al., 2013). Common to all of these locations is that they adopt a talk-based approach to political conflict where arguments can be exchanged which can be found in many (liberal) political systems (Dryzek et al., 2019; Mansbridge et al., 2012).

According to Mansbridge et al. (2012) the systemic approach helps to understand the effects of deliberation on the whole system. In other words, it is essential to go beyond the study of individual institutions and processes if we want to evaluate the effects of deliberation. A systemic approach investigates the relationships of different parts with the larger deliberative system. Therefore, it allows researchers to discuss the role of single institutions with regard to their impact on the deliberative system they are part of. Another advantage of it is that one can evaluate the deliberative strength and weaknesses of the smaller parts and judge to what extent the deliberative institution contributes to an overall deliberative system. For example, it might be that a mini-public’s design affects polarization levels positively, meaning it reduces the polarization level of the participant group, but does not have an impact on the polarization level in the wider public.

External quality criteria relevant to IP

When approaching my second research subquestion, the systemic impact of mini-publics becomes relevant. The systemic impact can be assessed by thesis by looking at external quality and hence, explore the complex relationship with the wider public sphere. Mini-publics that possess external quality have a positive impact in a deliberation-enhancing sense on the broader deliberative system in which they are situated (Curato & Boeker, 2016). Curato and Boeker (2016) present three specific criteria which together determine the external quality of mini-publics. Their argument states that a mini-public has external

deliberative quality if it fulfils all three criteria in its deliberative system. Since their fulfillment cannot be assumed generally, these criteria must be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. Only then can we evaluate to what extent an institutional design can overcome the consistent problem scale for deliberative democratic theory (Mansbridge et al., 2012).

However, as this thesis wants to research the effects of deliberation on IP and not deliberation-enhancing qualities in a general sense, we need to clarify the relationship of the three criteria with regard to IP. I argue that *deliberation making* and *capacity building* are directly relevant, while *seeking legitimacy*, does not affect IP in itself but strengthens the other two criteria for external quality. Hence, only an indirect relationship to IP can be found. Legitimacy in systemic terms is defined as the acceptance of the non-participants towards the mini-publics recommendations (legitimacy of outcome). This implies an obligation for the mini-public to persuade the wider public of their collective decision (Curato & Boeker, 2016). If legitimacy is established among non-participants, the other two criteria for external quality become more impactful. Accordingly, I claim that we need to focus on the extent the mini-public fulfils the two primary criteria sufficiently that it can create an impact on the polarization levels of non-participants. Seeking legitimacy plays a supportive role to these two.

The first criterion for external quality, deliberation making, describes how mini-publics can distill the relevant discourses to be forwarded to the wider public or create new spaces for further deliberation⁵. Essentially, mini-publics become a forum where complex discourses are discussed by participants for which the average participant has not enough resources to engage in similar intensity. As a result, they can, for example, work out much more nuanced policy positions on polarising issues than the wider public can (Curato & Boeker, 2016).

Hence, I argue their informed position through deliberation gives them more weight in the public debate outside of the deliberative experiment. In theory, participants can advocate for the well nuanced position on which they arrived at when participating in the mini-public and become a ‘mediator of knowledge’. Alternatively, when new spaces for deliberation (e.g. additional) mini-publics are established more people can enjoy the potential benefits which can be counted as deliberation-making too. The group being randomly selected without any official political function should grant them more acceptance by non-participants when receiving policy recommendation by the deliberating group. Moreover, when they are diverse in perspective, most non-participants should feel represented by them regardless of what position they have on the topic.

However, such distilled information only promotes deliberation-making if it enriches rather than ends public deliberation. In the best case scenario, mini-publics can facilitate the formation of a meta consensus or a public understanding of the range of available options. In the worst case, they shut down the larger debate by claiming epistemic authority instead of involving mass publics (Niemeyer & Dryzek, 2007). Consequently, a careful balance needs to be achieved under which they can stimulate further discussion and reflection among the non-participants, rather than claiming the last word on the topic under discussion (Curato & Boeker, 2016). When participants of mini-publics demand epistemic authority, they might lose the acceptance of the wider public. This is underlined by the importance of the *seeking legitimacy* criterion to deliberation making. If the participants or the recommendations they propose are not recognized as legitimate by the rest of the public, their weight in the debate diminishes. In that scenario, they will not influence the polarization levels of the wider public.

⁵ The term deliberation-making was first used by Niemeyer (2014) in his conceptualisation of mini-publics in the deliberative system. Curato & Boeker (2016) picked up his conceptualisation. This paper has added an additional layer to the definition by including the potential of creating new deliberative space to the criterion.

The second criterion which can be connected to IP concerns capacity building. It describes how mini-publics in systemic terms can build the capacity of a polity to host inclusive deliberation (Ibid, 2016). Mini-publics can play a part not only in enhancing the civic skills of participants but also strengthen the deliberative abilities of non-participants as the participants become ‘exemplars’ of deliberation (Niemeyer, 2014, p.179). Following my earlier argument about how accurate deliberation leads to more informed positions and increased awareness for other opinions, it follows that when the participants meet non-participants they can have an effect on them. For example, they can function as role models in discussion about political preferences or alternatively, also mediators between the polarized groups. However, this only holds true when the effects on participants last for a longer period after the mini-public ceases to exist (Dryzek, 2010; Niemeyer, 2014; Smith and Wales, 1999). Thus, the positive systemic impact of mini-publics is largely dependent on the role which citizens must fulfill and goes beyond the mini-public’s structural design alone (Curato & Boeker, 2016). This expected effect is mainly applicable in small communities with a low number of people. For instance, when many people in a community know someone who participated in a mini-public the level of interaction between them is high and therefore beneficial to depolarization.

It seems that an existing ground level of such capacity must already exist in the context in which the mini-public is embedded, so that it can be enhanced further. People within the deliberative system must be open and capable of interacting with participants of the mini-public. Against that background, Curato & Boeker (2016) argue that capacity building of mini-publics works better when they are well integrated in the deliberative system. In other words, they can perform their educational function more easily when the people are used to their institutionalisation and trust the judgment of participants afterwards. Again, the supportive role of legitimacy seeking to the other criteria comes forward. As *capacity building* relies on trust the public has in participants (and the deliberative process) it is crucial that a high level of acceptance is given. Only under these conditions can the participants have a lasting impact as mediators between polarized groups.

Having introduced the main concepts and explained their theoretical relationship, I will now present the two approaches which follow from the theoretical arguments. Afterwards, I outline how the approaches complement each other and help this paper to draw interdisciplinary conclusions.

3. Methodology

3.1 Empirical approach

This paper’s research strategy builds on Smith's (2012) prominent classification of mini-publics’ in which he distinguishes five main types of deliberative institutional designs: Citizens’ assembly, citizens’ juries, planning cells, consensus conferences and deliberative polls. All of them are conducted to discuss issues of public concern and have been used at different levels of administration and in a variety of policy areas (Smith, 2012). This paper concentrates on the three mini-publics which have received most of the academic attention and societal attention so far: Citizens’ assembly, citizens' jury and deliberative polls. They are starkly different in design and thereby cover a large range of possible design features of mini-

publics⁶. Focusing on these three, this thesis wants to offer a comprehensive overview to answer the first research subquestion.

After outlining their specific design criteria, I will analyse secondary empirical literature on the change in IP levels during deliberation with respect to the three mechanisms described earlier in the theory section (accountability, high stakes and diversity). By relating the empirical findings to the respective mechanisms, I will then clarify under which conditions mini-publics are most likely to influence polarization and possibly depolarize the participant groups.

Most of the literature on deliberative experiments is focussed on single case studies. Therefore I focus on multiple representative case studies which measure the effect of deliberation on IP of its participants to allow me to draw conclusions in terms of the mini-public more generally.⁷ Through comparison of the types of mini-publics, the empirical literature will allow us to identify which designs are most promising when it comes to their potential to depolarize.

For the citizens' assembly, I will review three case studies which vary greatly in topic and context. For the first case on electoral reform in the US, I rely on data from Gershtenson et al. (2010). The data for the second case is taken from a research paper by Farrell et al. (2013) who reviewed the Irish *We the citizens* initiative. In the third case, I analyse the data from the report of the citizens assembly on Brexit by Renwick et al. (2018). With respect to citizen's juries I also examine three very distinct cases. First, I analyse the study by Walker et al. (2019) on assisted dying in New Zealand. Secondly, I refer to the data from Pomatto's study (2012) on a jury discussing an infrastructure project in Italy. Thirdly, I rely on the Goodin & Niemeyer's (2003) findings on a citizen's jury considering a road construction in Australia. For deliberative polls I rely on a meta-study on 21 deliberative polls conducted by Luskin et al. (2017). Based on the study I can draw conclusions on the general design features of deliberative polls without comparing multiple cases myself.

3.2 Systems approach

A consistent problem for deliberative democracy theory is the problem of scale (Mansbridge et al. 2010). Mini-publics allow only for a small number of participants and studies therefore mainly capture the direct effects on them. However, using a systems approach this paper extends the analysis of the effect of deliberation within mini-publics on IP to the wider public.

For the purpose of assessing a mini-public's external quality in relation to IP it is necessary to rely on assessment which goes beyond the institutional design features of the mini-publics themselves (Mansbridge et al., 2012). It requires to critically examine the extent to which these criteria are realised within the often highly complex context and the contingencies between various parts of the deliberative system. Against the background of the three criteria that were outlined in the theory section, deliberation making, capacity building and legitimacy seeking, I review the different kinds of mini-publics separately. Therefore, I apply an explorative approach to one example per mini-public to illustrate how the three criteria work in practice and draw theoretical conclusions.

⁶ In contrast, some mini-publics are relatively similar in design. For instance, planning cells and consensus conferences share similar characteristics to citizens' juries (Smith, 2012; Smith & Wales, 1999).

⁷ Researchers that measure the effects of deliberation, mostly assume that deliberation is possible when certain structural conditions (like equality and autonomy among the participants) hold (Ryfe 2005). Due to the limited scope of this paper, I will follow this approach and focus on the measurement of pre- and post-test polarization levels.

I chose from cases that I referred to in the empirical analysis too, so the setup should already be clear. With respect to the citizen's assembly design, I picked the Irish initiative to explore the systemic impact because there politicians were included into the assembly, which already indicates a connection to another deliberative system. For citizen's juries, I decided to delve into the case study on assisted dying, since it exemplifies how a many-public can contribute to the public discourse and therefore provides valuable insights on the systemic impact. For deliberative polls, I use the meta-study by Luskin et al. (2017) again as it is my main source for the mini-public type.

Based on the assessment of the criteria we can evaluate the external quality of the mini-publics and consequently their potential to depolarize non-participants. This will offer a more nuanced answer to the second subquestion of this paper's research question.

2.3 Interdisciplinarity

Scholars working on deliberative democracy come from multiple disciplines (Ercan and Dryzek, 2015). Both theorists and empirics use insights from philosophy and political science to explore the topic. In fact, many studies are conducted from an interdisciplinary perspective, using integrated approaches. For example, empirical work on mini-publics builds on deliberative democratic theory and tries to test its claims about the effects and potential for citizen deliberation (e.g. Farrell et al., 2013). Conversely, philosophical work on deliberative democracy takes into account the developments from the empirical camp and adapts to them (Bächtiger & Wyss, 2013; Goodin & Dryzek, 2006)⁸.

This thesis builds on studies from both disciplinary backgrounds (philosophy and political science) of which many are already of interdisciplinary nature. Hence, making a clear-cut distinction tends to be oversimplifying. Nevertheless, structured by the two sub questions of this thesis, I can outline the different roles for the two disciplines. In both approaches the disciplines complement each other and therefore, both approaches are multidisciplinary.

For the first question, philosophical theory is used to develop a hypothesis on how the three mechanisms that allow accurate deliberation can potentially lead to depolarization of participants of mini-publics. Thereby, I set the theoretical stage for the empirical analysis. There this paper opts for a definitive approach, considering empirical studies from political science on the effects of different kinds of mini-publics on IP in light of the hypothesis.

Regarding the second question, I rely on deliberative theory to explain the framework of external quality. These insights from philosophy are taken to highlight the theoretical relationship between deliberative approaches and the wider deliberative system in which they operate. In the following explorative analysis I shed light on the context of the mini-publics. Based on the individual case's context, I evaluate to what extent the theoretical criteria for external quality are fulfilled. Finally, in the discussion section this thesis will integrate the findings of both sub questions on the level of results (Menken & Kestra, 2016). Connecting the insights of the two parts of the analysis will allow me to answer my main research question and arrive at an interdisciplinary understanding.

⁸ The systemic turn can in part be understood as a response to some of the earlier experiments with mini-publics which shows little impact on the wider political system. It was developed to chart the ways in which mini-publics, for instance, may have an impact in the "macro" world of politics (Goodin & Dryzek, 2006).

4. Analysis

The analysis is divided in two parts according to the two approaches this paper employs. In the empirical section I will start with the description of the case studies before shedding light on the mechanisms at play. Afterwards within the systems approach, I explore one of the cases per design and assess their systemic impact.

4.1 Empirical analysis

4.1.1 Citizens' assembly

Table 2. Citizens' assembly

Case Study	Accountability	High Stakes	Diversity	Change in IP
CACTUS	sufficient	sufficient	insufficient	Polarized
We the Citizens	sufficient	insufficient	sufficient	Depolarized
Brexit	sufficient	insufficient	sufficient	slightly depolarized

CACTUS

The first citizens assembly I investigate is called the *Citizens' Assembly on Critical Thinking about the United States* (CACTUS) held in spring 2008 during which students discussed the question: "Is it time to change the way we elect the President of the United States?". It took place at Eastern Kentucky University and consisted of 161 students, chosen through a process of random and self-selection (implying that people had to accept the invite), meeting biweekly over a time period of 10 months. The whole process consisted of learning, public hearings and deliberation phases. In the end, the aim of the deliberation of the citizens' assembly model was to reach a collective decision on the electoral design changes to be made.

Regarding the change in IP levels Gerstenson et al. (2010) found that CACTUS members became more extreme in their self-professed ideology and in their positions on issues after deliberation. In contrast, students that did not participate became less extreme and therefore did not polarize (Ibid, 2010). With the three criteria beneficial to depolarization in mind (Ryfe, 2005), we can reflect on the process now.

Accountability is reflected by the extent of plenary discussion settings and the level of transparency. During CACTUS small group sessions allowed for discussion and clarification with high levels of student interaction (Gershtenson et al., 2010). Also, they included a discussion board on which students were

obliged to post comments and respond to each other. Therefore, both aspects that tend to reduce polarization can be identified sufficiently so, theoretically one would expect a depolarizing effect in light of accountability.

Looking at the high stakes criterion, the CACTUS initiative had very direct consequences. The experiment was followed by a binding public referendum on the Assembly's recommendations (Ibid, 2010). This seems to be a straightforward and understandable follow up plan for the participants and hence, indicates depolarizing effects.

With respect to diversity of perspectives the assembly did not operate on a high standard. It seems to be problematic that they only included students into the assembly which are arguably more similar in their views than a cross section of society. Furthermore, in comparison to the Canadian counterparts from which they built their model, they were generally much smaller in numbers and less diverse with regard to student selection (Ibid, 2010). As outlined in section 2 there are many undesirable consequences of having a uniform group (Sunstein, 2002; Ryfe, 2005). Among students, my presumption is that Sunstein's (2002) social conformity argument is particularly relevant because I suspect them to align with popular group opinion.

We the Citizens

The second citizens assembly I inspect is the *We the Citizens* initiative which appeared in Ireland in 2011. It consisted of a random selection of 66 Irish residents to deliberate on specific issues relating to the economy and also reform in Irish politics. In addition, 33 members of the Irish parliament participated in the process. Farrell et al. (2013) identified large effects on the beliefs and attitudes of the members. When asked to position themselves on economic issues (e.g. 'the government should increase taxes a little and cut much more on health and social services') the majority of participants aligned themselves with the disagreement side. Similarly, after deliberating on political reform they also changed their opinions towards having a more uniform attitude. Thus, in both cases the participants depolarized as the divergence of preferences decreased. In fact, the majority of participants adopted the expert consensus on the matters so it can be assumed they simply followed their advice (Farrell et al., 2013).

When considering the deliberative process closely, it also becomes clear why Farrell et al. (2013) considered the expert opinions to be influential. The members were split up into groups of eight, each group with one or two experts and a discussion facilitator (depending on the topic). At first, the experts provided a brief presentation summarizing the main points. Afterwards, each table had an initial period of deliberation with the experts available to provide factual answers. Once the deliberation concluded, participants started a round of plenary discussion before going back to another session with their attributed tables. This shows the strong presence of experts in the discussions and indicates that they set the tone for the interactions. Additionally, it also displays that accountability was sufficiently present, as every participant had the chance to discuss their opinions openly with everyone during plenary discussion and hear about the tenor of each table's deliberation.

The high stakes criterion was not sufficiently fulfilled since no clear plan on the consequences of the initiative was developed before the start. Even though it was purposely launched within weeks of the 2011 election, the rationale was mainly to demonstrate the value of deliberative approaches to political reform but it was not defined how to act on the recommendations of the assembly (Farrell et al., 2013). Therefore, this is unlikely to have played a role in motivating participants to reconsider their positions.

Turning to the last criterion, diversity was ensured by two aspects: Firstly, due to the randomized composition of the group a certain set of different perspectives were present. Additionally, the members of parliament that were added came from various ideological backgrounds. Secondly, the intensive use of experts made sure that an understanding for the entire range of policy options (and their constraints) was developed and participants had the opportunity to open their minds to a potential opinion shift.

Citizens Assembly on Brexit

The third citizens assembly this paper relies on was held on Brexit in the UK in 2017. It included fifty randomly selected members of the public. However, unlike the previous two groups in this case the organizers used stratification to ensure that the electorate was reflected in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, social class and vote in the 2016 Brexit referendum (Renwick et al., 2017 report)⁹. The assembly focused on which post-Brexit arrangements the UK should pursue, especially concerning trade and migration.

Before the mini-public convened the members' opinions on the issues at stake were evenly split, meaning they were strongly polarized. After deliberation the great majority of participants retained their previous view (Ibid, 2017). If opinion shifts occurred they were small and in fact, broadly in the same direction, namely towards 'greater opposition to Brexit, acknowledgement of the benefits of immigration, and emphasis on maintaining trade rather than cutting immigration or controlling laws.' (Renwick et al., 2017, p. 75). Since they all show the same change, one could argue that parts of the group slightly depolarized on these matters.

We need to look at the deliberative process in detail to evaluate the three criteria for potential depolarization. Like in the previous case, group deliberation was designed mainly along small table discussions (7-8 people) in a mix with plenary sessions based on the factual input of experts. Unlike in the Irish assembly, experts were only present in the early learning phase and not part of the table discussions. Another difference was that the organizers ensured that all tables had a mix of people with regard to gender, age and referendum vote. Through the active role of table facilitators everyone was encouraged to speak in front of others (some people might be more uncomfortable than others in public speaking) and thereby it was ensured that all voices were heard equally¹⁰. Also, the groups changed daily based on a new seating plan (Renwick et al. 2017).

These aspects of the structure can be linked to the criteria of accountability and diversity. The fact that all members had to formulate and justify their opinions publicly in front of many different groups contributed to accountability. Active moderation by table facilitators and the change of seats was particularly important for this mechanism. Furthermore, diversity of perspectives was stimulated through stratification of the table groups as well as the assembly's composition overall. Another aspect that fits under the criterion of diversity and is likely to have depolarized participants are the conversation guidelines of the assembly. They specifically stress the importance of being open-minded towards the other's viewpoints.

In view of high stakes, the citizen's assembly did not present any concrete consequences of deliberation to the participants. The experiment was conducted to learn about public opinion in the

⁹ While it is likely that with the current stratification method a certain degree of varying viewpoints is given. Renwick et al. (2017) acknowledge that they could have also explicitly considered the application of attitudinal stratification to secure diversity in perspectives.

¹⁰ Table facilitator's task was to focus entirely on structure and process and not the content of discussion (Renwick et al., 2017)

ongoing Brexit debate and provide evidence on the value of deliberation, however beyond that there was no follow-up plan which could have served as extra motivation for participants to deliberate more accurately.

Based on the three citizens assemblies we can observe that in the first case deliberation resulted in polarization while the second and third showed depolarization. In light of the theoretical criteria, it seems likely that in the first case the lack of diversity of perspective contributed to a polarized outcome (Ryfe, 2005; Sunstein, 2000; Sunstein 2002). Even though the other two cases lack sufficient high stakes, they both resulted in depolarization (the second case in a much smaller degree), suggesting that the high stakes criterion does not need to be met necessarily to ensure accurate deliberation that can lead to depolarization.

4.1.2 Citizens' juries

The next form of mini-public under investigation are citizens' juries. In comparison to citizens assemblies they consist of fewer people (12-24 people) and last shorter (Smith, 2012). Therefore, the design is often criticized for lacking a sufficient number of members to make representative recommendations on policy issues (Smith & Wales, 1999). Accordingly, with regard to the potential depolarizing effects of deliberation within citizens juries, it is more difficult to measure statistically significant changes due to the small sample size.

Table 3. Citizens juries

Case Study	Accountability	High Stakes	Diversity	Change in IP
EAD	sufficient	sufficient	insufficient	polarized
Castelfranco di Sotto	insufficient	sufficient	insufficient	depolarized
Queensland jury	sufficient	sufficient	insufficient	depolarized

EAD

The first citizen's jury I review was held by Walker et al. (2019) to study whether a group of 15 New Zealanders thought the law on Euthanasia or assisted dying (EAD) should be changed to legalize some form of EAD. The research purpose of the experiment was to understand why people disagree about EAD, to learn whether their positions would change through informed deliberation and to add knowledge to the international debate on the highly polarizing issue. The members were non-experts, recruited based on the invitation of a random sample of 151 people from the study area's electoral roll.¹¹ The jury gathered only for a period of two and a half days, which afterwards was judged as too short by the organizers, possibly limiting the quality of the deliberative process (Walker et al., 2019). Some members did indicate they would have benefited from more time to process all the information presented to them by experts,

¹¹ This again raises concerns about potential self-selection problems since only certain kinds of people accept the invite (see French & Laver, 2009).

however the organizers were afraid of not gathering enough participants given the low amount of remuneration they could offer.

After deliberation, the jury did not arrive at a consensus but became polarized in their positions with multiple members changing their positions to either strong opposition or strong support of the law change. Indicators in support of this outcome are the lack of diversity of perspectives as well as the missing of high stakes. When choosing the participants diversity in perspectives was not insufficiently controlled for. The only control measure that was taken during recruitment entailed excluding those applicants who identified as either having strong fixed positions or those that were considered to be experts because of their professional background (e.g. doctors). As a result, the majority of jury members was in favor of the law change before the deliberation, creating an imbalance in viewpoints from the start. During the deliberation these members polarized further making them 'firmly supportive' of the law change (Walker et al, 2019, p.392). This mechanism is unsurprising as it is in line with Sunstein's findings on group polarization in homogeneous groups (Sunstein, 2002). Looking at high stakes, it becomes clear that the jury's work had concrete consequences. A report on the deliberative event was forwarded to policy makers to contribute to the ongoing debate on EAD at the time in New Zealand. Therefore, the participants' contributions were essential to the policy process and the ongoing public discussion. Also, the efforts they invested to ensure accountability were potentially depolarizing. Facilitators were guiding the plenary discussion to make sure that everyone was able to participate and could present their points to the group. Additionally, for the sake of transparency a written report on the discussion phase was written.

Castelfranco di Sotto jury

The second citizens jury I examine is the Castelfranco di Sotto jury on the matter of building a waste pyro-gasifier in the local municipality of Castelfranco di Sotto in Tuscany in 2011. It consisted of an irregularly large group of 50 jury members, selected at random. It also lasted relatively long for a citizens jury standard, as the jury came together in six separate sessions over a period of two months. Their change in preferences was significant and unequivocal (Pomatto, 2012). Prior to the jury deliberation seven members were in favor of building, while 23 were against and 20 abstained. In fact, afterwards the whole jury was against the proposal, meaning that they strongly depolarized.

According to Pomatto's study (2012) on the citizens jury this can be explained by the poor standard of deliberation during the process. Firstly, the facilitators were seen as partial by the juries as they defended building the facility. This created a harmful dynamic to the discussion since arguments in favor were not put forward anymore by jury members in the minority since they were afraid of isolation from the rest of the (unified) jury (Pomatto, 2012). This development is highlighted by the diminishing contributions in favor in the later deliberation sessions, resulting in insufficient diversity of perspectives. It is important to note that this is clearly not because of a lack of arguments for building of the facility. In the hearings prior to the deliberation phases, experts offered information and data that could have been used. Their arguments in support of the construction were systematically ignored during the deliberation process.

Secondly, the citizens jury lacked accountability. Pomatto (2012) reports that a subgroup of jury members met multiple times behind closed doors outside the jury sessions to discuss strategies to influence the discussion. Therefore, both core aspects of accountability, transparency and plenary discussion, were violated.

The high stakes criterion was met as the jury was part of the decision-making process on the matter of building the facility or not. Given the low standard of deliberation otherwise, this is unlikely to have made a difference to the depolarization mechanism though. Overall, it seems that the depolarizing effect cannot be associated with either of the criteria but more likely resulted from a non-deliberative process (Sunstein, 2002).

Far North Queensland Citizens' Jury

The final citizens jury I examine is the Far North Queensland Citizens' Jury where 12 jury members met to discuss policy options for the Bloomfield track, a controversial road project leading through the Daintree rainforest. Supporters argue for the need for access of the Bloomfield community, while critics highlight the direct impact on the rainforests ecosystem (Goodin & Niemeyer, 2003). The jury was selected on a random stratified basis from among 300 respondents to 2000 invites sent out in the region. The final jury was demographically mixed (based on gender, age and education) and all members were residents of the local region. They gathered over a period of four days in January 2000. On the first day they visited the road site and received background briefings. The second and third day was used for hearings and questioning of technical experts and community representatives.¹² The fourth day was dedicated to deliberation among the jury.

Goodin and Niemeyer (2003) find that the participants' preferences over the available policy options shifted drastically during the jury process. While the jury was initially divided, they developed strong (still not unanimous) preferences for closing the track afterwards (10 out of 12 jurors). However, unlike in the previous case studies, the depolarization can be already identified before the deliberation, namely in the information phase (Goodin & Niemeyer, 2003).¹³ This was found out by surveying the jury's attitudes on the proposed policy options at different points in the process. Analysing the attitudes during the process allowed the researchers to pinpoint when and why the attitudes of the members changed.

Based on the findings that the information phase produced a much greater change in attitudes does not mean that the deliberation was insignificant (Goodin & Niemeyer, 2003). Instead it highlights that the deliberation in this case had much less consequence than the information phase beforehand. In line with this we see that the accuracy standard of deliberation within the jury was relatively low. Only the accountability criterion was fulfilled sufficiently, as members had to formulate their opinions in front of members and experts during the questioning. Diversity of perspectives was missing since the selection did not account for different views in the first place and when the discussion started 10 out of 12 people had already agreed. Lastly, as the Jury met for academic research purposes on the use of deliberative processes and had no direct connection to the official policy making process, high stakes in forms of direct consequences were not traceable.

The crucial takeaway from this case analysis is that the deliberation phase is only one factor of the mini-public's procedure and it might be relevant to distinguish it from the information phase (also called learning phase in other studies) when studying the effects. It might be that the shift in attitudes cannot be attributed exclusively to interpersonal discussion but happens prior to it already (Goodin & Niemeyer,

¹² Experts consisted of two groups. Technical witnesses presenting their takes on issues to do with engineering, planning, the impact of the track on the reef and tourism and majors of the two local councils functioning as communities representatives (Goodin & Niemeyer, 2003)

¹³ The information phase includes everything up until day three, while the deliberation phase covers the fourth day.

2003). It is contrary to the strong arguments made in favor of ‘accurate’ deliberation by deliberative democrats, stressing the importance of interaction in discussion (Dryzek, 2010; Niemeyer, 2014; Smith and Wales, 1999).

Overall, one of the three citizens’ jury cases resulted in polarization while two depolarized. All citizens’ juries under investigation seem to lack diversity of perspectives, partly because of the inherently small number of members the design includes. Besides the theoretical criteria this thesis reflected on, the second case and the third case added important nuances to the theoretical inquiry into mini-publics. In the Italian case, it becomes clear that a low deliberative quality can lead to the members agreeing with the majority opinion. In that context, depolarization cannot be viewed as a result of accurate deliberation. The Australian case added the important analytical distinction between the information and deliberation phase during a mini-public. In this case the information phase was more significant for the depolarization than the actual deliberation. This insight teaches us that we need to treat the phases separately during the analysis if we want to study purely the effects of deliberation on polarization.

4.1.3 Deliberative polls

Deliberative polls are different to other mini-publics designs as a single poll potentially involves hundreds, sometimes up to thousands, of people. Furthermore, they do not ask members to give policy recommendations or make collective decisions of some sort but instead to fill out a pre- and post-deliberation questionnaire to record changes in opinions and degree of knowledge (Smith, 2012).

Table 4. Deliberative polls

Case Study	Accountability	High Stakes	Diversity	Change in IP
Meta-study by Luskin et al.	Sufficient	Insufficient	Sufficient	Slightly depolarized

This paper’s analysis of deliberative polls builds on the meta-study of 21 deliberative polls effects conducted by Luskin et al. (2017). Unlike for the previous two designs, I will use their overview as my main source as it covers a representative number of cases for DP.

The case studies all share a set of common characteristics. They incorporate a large number of randomly sampled participants which were randomly assigned to small groups; reimbursements were granted to incentives participation; and deliberation happened within moderated small group discussions with plenary question-and-answer sessions (Q&A) with policy experts. Various topics were discussed including policy issues from foreign policy to health care. Overall, the dataset encompasses 372 small groups (containing 5,736 participants), 139 policy issues (counting each policy attitude index as tapping a somewhat different issue), and 2,601 group-issue pairs (Luskin et al., 2017).

Looking at the relationship of deliberative polls and IP the study finds no routine or strong polarization. Some studies show limited polarization, some exhibit depolarization.¹⁴ However, the overall pattern suggests only some slight ideological depolarization, meaning that on average the mean attitudes move slightly toward the midpoint of the scale.

Connecting these insights to the theory on accurate deliberation (Ryfe, 2005), I find that the accountability and diversity criteria are fulfilled by the deliberative poll design while high stakes are

¹⁴ What this paper calls depolarization is referred to as ‘moderation’ by Luskin et al. (2017).

inherently absent. The mini-public explicitly includes accountability for one's views into the deliberation process, since the small group deliberations as well as the Q&A's with experts require everyone to justify their positions in front of others, contributing to higher accuracy (Luskin et al. 2017). Also, in many cases transparency is provided by television coverage of the deliberative process which has a positive impact on accountability (Luskin et al., 2002)¹⁵. Diversity of perspectives is assured through random assignment of members to the smaller deliberation groups and the direct interaction within these entities. Additionally, the expert panels provide a balanced view on the issue at hand, strengthening the participants' potential to change their opinion and depolarize as a group.

The high stakes criterion cannot be fulfilled by deliberative polls in its current design because its goal is not to take over decision making processes from other institutions but rather measure changes in opinion and knowledge as a result of participating. In other words, a design which does not take decisions, cannot include direct and understandable consequences of such missing decisions.

In sum, it appears that deliberative polls show a slight depolarization. However, we cannot distinguish to what extent this is a consequence of the better information on the topic or produced by deliberation (Goodin & Niemeyer, 2003). They possess a high degree of accountability and diversity but no high stakes. Accountability is ensured through public speaking during discussion and high transparency towards the public provided through TV coverage. Diversity of perspectives in deliberative polls is generally likely, even though no stratification is applied, because of the large number of people included. High stakes is inherently absent as the design does not result in collective decisions which one could demonstrate the consequences of.

4.2 Systemic role

4.2.1 Citizens' assembly

We the citizens initiative

In addition to its overall depolarizing effect on participants, when judged against the three criteria for external to IP, the *We the Citizens* initiative in Ireland displays effects with regards to deliberation making and capacity building but still is unlikely to depolarize the wider public, mainly due to the lack of legitimacy.

In support of deliberation making and capacity building one can identify several uptakes of the deliberative approach in the larger political system. Deliberation-making was enhanced since a political debate about the future integration of mini-publics into the political system was ignited among politicians. First of all, members of the parliament were already included in the assembly which directly linked the two deliberative systems of the mini-public with the legislative body. Also, after the mini-public ended, the findings were presented to the leader of the Irish labour party and a series of meetings with other ministers and senior advisers followed (Farrell et al., 2013).

Deliberation-making was also supported because of the introduction of additional mini-publics which allowed more citizens to participate in the deliberative process on political and constitutional

¹⁵ Luskin refers to this paper for a more detailed description of deliberative poll's design. With regard to TV coverage he does not claim without it an event would not be a deliberative poll without television, but every Deliberative Poll he has witnessed 'has been televised in some fashion' (Luskin et al., 2002, p. 459).

reform and potentially depolarizes a larger group of citizens within these mini-publics. Government officials acknowledged the benefits regarding the potential of having more citizens involved in future mini-publics. In accordance with that, in 2012 the Irish government established a constitutional convention, along the deliberative example of the *We the Citizens* initiative (Ibid, 2013). This in turn led to higher capacity building, as more participants developed better civic skills within the deliberative process and consequently could function as exemplars in their social network (Niemeyer, 2014). However, the limitation still holds that this is unlikely to influence a number of people large enough to have an effect on polarization in society as a whole.

In contrast to this (small) positive impact on deliberation making and capacity building, the response of the media to the mini-public was not as conducive. The common tenor was generally along the lines of Ireland being ‘different’, arguing that while deliberation might be a useful method in other (country) contexts, ‘things work differently here’ (Farrell et al. 2013, p. 111). This evaluation in the media undermined the legitimacy of mini-publics in Ireland as it diminished public trust in the method. Also, the negative verdict does not stimulate further debate but rather ends it, which is detrimental to deliberation making (Niemeyer & Dryzek, 2007). Without a doubt the media’s influence on the efforts is more influential to a country’s public opinion than a few hundreds or thousands of additional participants. Therefore, the *We the Citizens* initiative is unlikely to have had a significant impact on polarization levels on non-participants in Ireland.

4.2.2 Citizens’ juries

EAD

At the time the citizens jury on EAD was held New Zealand’s legislature was already debating on the topic from a policy perspective (Walker et al., 2019). Prior to the citizens jury research, the Parliamentary Health Select Committee conducted a large-scale investigation of public attitudes on the issue, showing both strong support for and opposition against a law change among New Zealanders. While the citizen’s jury did not contribute to depolarizing participants, it had a significant systemic impact. By forwarding the knowledge of the citizens jury to the Select Committee it essentially forwarded the relevant information to another deliberative subsystem (Walker et al., 2019). In fact, it was taken into account by the parliament debating the End of Life Choice Bill (New Zealand parliament, 2019). In 2019 the bill was finally adopted, allowing people with a terminal illness or an irremediable medical condition the legal option of making a voluntary choice over the timing of their death if they meet certain criteria (New Zealand parliament, 2019).

On a general note, the design of a citizen’s jury, including very few members in comparison to other mini-publics does not seem promising in terms of capacity building. The low number of participants will not have significant deliberation enhancing effects on the wider public, even if all of them would turn into perfect ‘exemplars’ of deliberation (Niemeyer, 2014).

The mini-public contributed to the public discourse through deliberation-making. Through the mini-public, the knowledge produced during the experiment was distilled to parts of the wider public, in this case to the legislators. It would be an overestimation to tie back this law change to the mini-public’s alone, but certainly a contribution was made to the ongoing debate. In fact, the case also hints at capacity building among the legislators as they were directly influenced by the results of the citizen’s jury. After all, the legislators managed to find compromise on a previously very polarizing issue. To those that

carefully considered the citizens jury's outcome, it could have offered important insights on why people disagree and the reasons behind that. However, this remains rather speculative and it cannot be proven that legislators used these insights to overcome the existing divide during the policy making process. Even so, the systemic impact would be limited only to the legislative, which is particularly important with regard to policy issues but remains a tiny fraction of the wider public.

Again, the case underlines the theoretical importance of legitimacy as a supporting condition to the other two criteria of external quality. The extent to which non-participants follow the recommendation of the mini-public is dependent on the acceptance of it.

4.2.3 Deliberative polls

Similar to the empirical section, the explorative analysis on deliberative polls builds on the meta study by Luskin et al. and therefore concentrates on external quality that can be derived from the design in a general sense. Deliberative polls include large numbers of people which theoretically gives them more systemic impact in terms of capacity building. A high number of people get to participate in the slightly depolarizing deliberative process followed by them interacting with others creating increased awareness for other opinions. However, this needs to be set into perspective by comparing the number of people participating plus their interactions with the number of people affected by the issue at stake.

As most deliberation processes of deliberative polls are broadcasted on television (in a summarized format) they can enhance further deliberation-making. While television in its usual usage functions as a tool of confirming pre existing biases by adapting the content to its audience (Landemore & Mercier, 2010), the deliberative poll utilizes the technology in a constructive way (Luskin et al., 2002). The coverage on the deliberation offers the opportunity for viewers to discover new aspects brought in by the diverse perspectives and perhaps an incentive to arrive at a more considered opinion themselves (Ibid, 2002). This does not mean that they will experience all the benefits of deliberation since they do not actively deliberate when observing but they might develop a more tolerant, less extreme stance.

With regard to legitimacy making, deliberative polls are difficult to evaluate. On the one hand, they do not make collective decisions, so they are not aiming at persuading the wider public in their current format (Curato & Boeker, 2016). On the other hand if they would make decisions or develop policy recommendations, they would have the means to fulfill the criterion, given the broadcasting of their efforts. However, in the current set up they do not exploit this potential.

The explorative systems approach applied to three cases showed that the mini-publics have links to other deliberative systems but are unlikely to influence IP levels significantly. The Irish citizens' assembly illustrates that even though deliberation making and capacity building effects could be expected among legislators, without sufficient legitimacy the wider public's polarization levels are unlikely to be affected. The citizens jury supports that finding by again underlining the theoretical importance of legitimacy as a supporting condition to the other two criteria of external quality. Furthermore, I find that citizens' juries are limited in their ability to enhance capacity buildings since they only include very few people. In comparison, we see that a larger number of participants (e.g. in deliberative polls) increases the impact in terms of capacity building. Not only do deliberative polls have advantages in capacity building due to their large number of participants, but also, their TV coverage can reach a wide audience and offer a range of new opinions to viewers. This allows them to have a higher potential systemic impact. If deliberative polls would take decisions the broadcasting tool would allow them to easily gain acceptance.

5. Conclusion

The larger aim of this thesis was to find out whether deliberation within mini-publics can be useful to reduce the level of IP in society. Therefore, the analysis divided society into two groups: Participants and non-participants of mini-publics. Accordingly, I arrived at two sets of results.

The empirical results on the participants, based on a range of case studies from various contexts, demonstrated the potential of mini-publics to depolarize under certain conditions. It became apparent that diversity of perspectives is a key criterion that needs to be ensured to allow accurate deliberation. If the group is too similar in viewpoints this study can confirm the expected tendency of the group to polarize in opinions (Ryfe, 2005; Sunstein, 2000; Sunstein 2002). In light of the importance of diversity, citizens' juries seem to be of very limited use to stimulate depolarization. Due to their small member size they cannot sufficiently facilitate the required range of perspectives. In contrast, deliberative polls provide diversity in perspectives without having to use stratification as they are large in participant numbers.

Accountability was met by all designs besides the Castelfranco di Sotto jury which lacked deliberative quality in general. This demonstrates that all mini-publics tested in this paper, acknowledge the importance of putting deliberation at the core and allow 'even-handed weighing-of-the-merits' (Luskin et al., 2017, p.2).

With regard to the results on high stakes I question its importance for depolarization as all cases of citizens assembly and deliberative polls in which depolarization occurred did not sufficiently fulfil the criterion. The citizens' juries resulting in depolarization met the criterion but this paper has found that these two cannot be explained by any of the accuracy criteria of the deliberation phase.

Here the empirical analysis of citizen's juries led to two new insights about deliberation within mini-publics. Firstly, in the Italian case we have seen that a certain standard of deliberative quality is needed to make claims about its effects on citizens. Otherwise, a poor deliberative process tends to produce very different results. In other words, the resulting depolarization must not always be a consequence of accurate deliberation but can also happen in complete absence of it. Secondly, the Australian case showed that mini-publics' procedures consist of two phases of which we need to distinguish the effects. Both the information phase and the deliberation phase can have effects on their participants, so we need to be careful which effects we associate with each.¹⁶ Future research should be aware of this and measure the effects on participants at different points during the mini-public event. Only then can we discover how much of the event's effect stems from information gains in comparison to discussing and exchanging opinions during deliberation. It might happen that one finds more cases which assign the majority of effects to the information phase rather than holding deliberation responsible for the positive changes of participants (Dryzek, 2010; Niemeyer, 2014; Smith and Wales, 1999). If we take this suggestion a step further and reduce the scope even more, studies could break down the analysis of the deliberation phase into smaller parts and thereby test which elements in particular lead to changes in preferences. Thereby, it would become clearer, for instance, how the small group discussions or the large group discussions differ in effect.

The theoretical results revealed that mini-publics are unlikely to affect the IP levels of non-participants. Through the exploration of the three cases, it became clear that mini-publics are linked

¹⁶ The information phase is sometimes referred to as the learning phase in other studies on mini-publics (see Gershtenson et al., 2010).

to other deliberative systems but not to an extent which could significantly affect the whole electorate's IP levels. For example, the citizens' assembly case contributed to further capacity building and deliberation making among the legislators involved. Also, the citizens' jury case displayed external quality by influencing the policy discourse on EAD. Both cases provided evidence for the importance of legitimacy as a foundation for the other two external quality criteria to be effective. This implies that mini-publics should always carefully consider the acceptance by non-participants for their recommendations and think of ways to ensure it. For example, it could be an option to allow transparent TV coverage of the events, like we see in deliberative polls.

Now, with the integration of the two sets of results, I can answer this thesis's main research question. Deliberation within mini-publics has the potential to affect the level of IP of the participants but this potential does not hold with regard to the wider public. The two approaches have independently highlighted certain aspects of the design's structure which are beneficial to both, to the likelihood to depolarize participants and the mini-publics external quality (even when it does not significantly affect IP). One is that a larger member size seems to benefit both the potential to depolarize the participants and results in a higher potential of capacity building and deliberation making. For that purpose, the citizens' jury is arguably the least promising design relative to the other two. Secondly, which is also implicit in large sample sizes, diversity of perspectives is advantageous for both effects. On the one hand, it is crucial for accurate deliberation and therefore to the depolarization potential of participants of mini-publics. On the other hand, it is also a core requirement to allow external quality. Further deliberation making, capacity building and seeking legitimacy require a range of different positions as a foundation for accurate deliberation which then can develop effects on other deliberative systems.

Finally, I need some general limitation this thesis' approach entails. Firstly, none of the mini-public experiments took place in a vacuum, therefore it is unavoidable to exclude external influences which might have played a part but were not taken into account during the analysis. Thus, conclusions about causality when looking at the various mechanisms at play need to be formulated carefully. Secondly, the claims made about the outcomes of deliberation might not apply forever. Participants were usually questioned right after the mini-publics work, however it is not given that these changes in IP last forever. It seems unlikely that a few days of increased information on a topic followed by deliberation can reverse lifelong entrenched views permanently. Hence, it might be helpful to reassess the attitudes of participants after some time has passed. Lastly, I concentrated on only three distinct kinds of mini-publics even though I am aware that other designs exist too. While I covered a large range of differences in structure, other mini-publics might provide additional or different insights when investigated separately.

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