

QUALITATIVE—NOT QUANTITATIVE—DELIBERATIVE POLLING?

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Abstract

The last twenty years have seen the emergence of a new generation of polls: the deliberative polls. Unlike usual polling, deliberative polling—first suggested by Fishkin and Luskin—emphasizes not only the representation of polling but also the deliberation. The deliberative poll attempts to represent all in a given population, through a statistical microcosm empowered to think about the issues in question under favorable conditions—the sample population takes a questionnaire, then is informed through a learning process that alternates discussions in small groups and with experts and politicians, and eventually re-takes the same questionnaire.

Although—quantitative—deliberative polling catches the big picture—what people think before and after and how their opinions vary, it hardly gives any insight on why the citizens change their opinions and, above all, what it means after the learning process. This question is especially important in topics where little change of opinions may be expected such as political preferences and identities. Specifically, the qualitative deliberative polling is used to explore the relationship between the citizens' perception (understood as knowledge, legitimacy, identity, and perception of the others) of the federal government in both Belgium and Canada and their federal preferences vis-à-vis the evolution of the regime.

Conducting qualitative and quantitative deliberative polling in those cases seem to offer the best result since the quantitative aspect provides a general picture of the change of opinions while the qualitative aspect endeavors to understand the change of opinions. Qualitative deliberative polling relies on a systematic qualitative content analysis of the focus groups' discussions and interaction between the participants and the experts. To combine qualitative methods with—quantitative—deliberative polling has the potential to provide a finer picture of the citizens' opinions on a broad variety of topics and issues.

Methodological originality

The methodology combines quantitative and qualitative methods in a quasi-experiment, which is original and innovative but not without caveats—a smaller sample, thus less representative than in quantitative-only deliberative polling. Moreover, deliberative polls are organized on the same issue in four different settings: French-speaking and Flemish-speaking Belgium, French-speaking and English-speaking Canada. Above all, the experiment is conducted by a graduate student without much financial resources. Finally, qualitative and quantitative deliberative polling is both an interesting way to collect data for a dissertation and an easy means to involve citizens in political life, in general, and in social sciences research, in particular.

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The last twenty years have seen the emergence of a new generation of polls: the deliberative polls. Unlike usual polling, deliberative polling—first suggested by James S. Fishkin and Robert C. Luskin²—emphasizes not only the representation in polling but also the deliberation.³ Although—quantitative—deliberative polling catches the big picture—what people think before and after, and how their opinions vary, it hardly gives any insight on why the citizens change their opinions—and what it means—after the learning process. This question is especially important in topics where little change of opinions may be expected such as political preferences and identities. Conducting qualitative and quantitative deliberative polling in those cases seem to offer the best result since the quantitative aspect provides a general picture of the change of opinions while the qualitative aspect endeavors to understand the change of opinions. Qualitative deliberative polling relies on focus groups, textual analysis, and analysis of the perception and the representation. Combining qualitative methods with—quantitative—deliberative polling has the potential to provide a finer picture of the citizens' opinions on a broad variety of topics and issues.

¹ The author is grateful to Carsten Jensen as well as to the participants to the 2nd ECPR Summer School in Methods and Techniques for their many insightful comments at an earlier stage of the manuscript.

² See, e.g., Bruce A. Ackerman and James S. Fishkin, *Deliberation Day* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), James S. Fishkin, *Democracy and deliberation : new directions for democratic reform* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), James S. Fishkin, *The voice of the people : public opinion and democracy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), James S. Fishkin, "Consulting the public through deliberative polling," *Journal of Policy Analysis & Management* 22, no. 1 (2003), James S. Fishkin and Peter Laslett, *Debating deliberative democracy*, Philosophy, politics and society (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003), James S. Fishkin and Robert C. Luskin, "Broadcasts of Deliberative Polls: Aspirations and Effects," *British Journal of Political Science* 36, no. 1 (2006), Robert C. Luskin, James S. Fishkin, and Roger Jowell, "Considered Opinions: Deliberative Polling in Britain," *British Journal of Political Science* 32, no. 3 (2002). See also the website of the Center for Deliberative Democracy at <http://cdd.stanford.edu/>, accessed on July 23, 2007.

³ Since the first deliberative poll on crime policy in Manchester, in April 1994, deliberative polling has been increasingly applied to various issues in several countries. Among the most recent experiments are the first deliberative polls in China and in Spain.

Specifically, I apply *qualitatively orientated* deliberative polling to explore the relationship between the citizens' perception (understood as knowledge, legitimacy, identity, and perception of the others) of the federal government in both Belgium and Canada and their federal preferences vis-à-vis the evolution of the regime. This peculiar use of deliberative polling conveys methodological originality. First, it combines quantitative and qualitative methods in a quasi-experiment⁴, which is original and innovative but not without caveats—smaller sample, thus less representative than quantitative-only deliberative polling. Moreover, the presentation enters the bigger debate about participatory methods in social sciences and public policy. Above all, the experiment is conducted by a graduate student (in four different fields—Francophone and Flemish Belgium, Anglophone and Francophone Canada) without much financial resources. Finally, qualitative and quantitative deliberative polling is both an interesting way to collect data for a dissertation and an easy mean to involve citizens in social sciences research.

CONVENTIONAL POLLING VS. DELIBERATIVE POLLING

Since the first polling experiences led by George H. Gallup, public opinions polls have attempted to both provide an accurate picture of the citizens' opinions on a wide variety of issues and give a voice to democracy and its people.⁵ However, although conventional polls rely on scientific random samples, they have failed to attain their goals because they measure *uninformed* opinions.⁶ In fact, "the most fundamental problem is that not many of the respondents answering any given question have very well considered or informed opinions about the issue."⁷ Two major

⁴ See Donald Thomas Campbell, Julian C. Stanley, and N. L. Gage, *Experimental and quasi-experimental designs for research* (Chicago: R. McNally, 1966), William R. Shadish, Thomas D. Cook, and Donald Thomas Campbell, *Experimental and quasi-experimental designs for generalized causal inference* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2001).

⁵ George Horace Gallup, *Public opinion in a democracy*, The Stafford Little Lectures (Princeton: Princeton University Extension Service, Herbert L. Baker foundation, 1939), George Horace Gallup and Saul Forbes Rae, *The pulse of democracy; the public-opinion poll and how it works* (New York: Greenwood Press, [1940] 1968).

⁶ Public opinions have been criticized from many different perspectives. One of the harshest criticism is found in Pierre Bourdieu, see, e.g., Pierre Bourdieu, "L'opinion publique n'existe pas," *Les Temps modernes*, no. 318 (1973).

⁷ Luskin, Fishkin, and Jowell, "Considered Opinions: Deliberative Polling in Britain," 456.

difficulties of modern democracy are at stake here: “rational ignorance”⁸ and “non-attitudes”⁹. While the former was coined by Anthony Downs to explain the lack of incentives for ordinary citizens to become well informed, the latter, suggested by Philip E. Converse, posits that many of the opinions reported in conventional polls may not even exist.

By contrast, deliberative polling attempts “to represent everyone in a given population, through a statistical microcosm empowered to think about the issues in question under favorable conditions.”¹⁰ In other words, “a Deliberative Poll is designed to show what the public *would* think about the issues, if it thought more earnestly and had more information about them.”¹¹ To do so, the proponents of deliberative polling propose the following formula.¹² First, a probability random sample of the population takes a conventional survey. Second, amongst the surveyed population, a random sample of people—who accepts to participate to the experiment—gathers to a single site where they spend one or several days deliberating on the issue at stake as well as discussing with one another in small groups. Third, in the course of the event, the participants put questions to panel of experts and political leaders. Fourth, the participants take the same questionnaire. Finally, excerpt portions of the proceedings are broadcasted on television.¹³ In sum, a deliberative poll is a “social-scientific quasi-experiment, capable of shedding light on questions central to both political behaviour and democratic theory.”¹⁴

Many insightful observations have come out the analysis of the deliberative polling experiences. In a short summary article, Fishkin highlights seven of them.

⁸ Anthony Downs, *An economic theory of democracy* (New York: Harper, 1957).

⁹ Philip E. Converse, "The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics," in *Ideology and discontent*, ed. David Ernest Apter (New York: Free Press, 1964).

¹⁰ Fishkin, "Consulting the public through deliberative polling," 128.

¹¹ Luskin, Fishkin, and Jowell, "Considered Opinions: Deliberative Polling in Britain," 458.

¹² For a practical guide to Deliberative polling, see Janice Elliott, "Participatory Methods Toolkit: A practitioner's manual. Deliberative Polling®," ed. Stef Steyaert and Hervé Lisoir (King Baudouin Foundation The Flemish Institute for Science and Technology (viWTA), 2005).

¹³ Fishkin and Luskin, "Broadcasts of Deliberative Polls: Aspirations and Effects."

¹⁴ Luskin, Fishkin, and Jowell, "Considered Opinions: Deliberative Polling in Britain," 459.

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First, [...] we have managed to gather a highly representative sample of the population in question to come for an extended face-to-face deliberation. [...]

Second, in every case, opinions on politics and policy change significantly, often to a large degree. For the most part, the considered judgments revealed by Deliberative Polling differ significantly from the respondents' initial responses.

Third, we can demonstrate that the respondents become much more informed by the end of the process, based on information questions asked before and after.

Fourth, [...] information gain explains a lot of the opinion change. It is primarily those who become more informed on the issues who also change their views about them.

Fifth, change of opinion in the Deliberative Poll does not correlate with any of the standard sociodemographic factors, such as education, income, class, or gender. [...]

Sixth, in cases with ranking questions, we have found a higher degree of preference “structuration” [...] after deliberation compared with the views in initial questionnaires. [...]

Respondents may not agree on a single answer but they agree about what they are agreeing-or disagreeing-about. [...]

Seventh, we have not found the debilitating patterns of group “polarization” [...]. Unlike jury discussions, our deliberative process does not require an agreed verdict and it has, with trained moderators, elements of balance that seem to inoculate it from reaching conclusions as a predictable artifact of the initial group composition.¹⁵

These impressive results demonstrate that, among other methods of public consultation, deliberative polling is one of the most ambitious.¹⁶ It has the potential to represent the entire public through a scientific random sample, foster deliberation on key issue of mass politics, and, above all, give an *informed* voice to democracy.

QUALITATIVE DELIBERATIVE POLLING

Yet, although—quantitative—deliberative polling¹⁷ catches the big picture—what people think before and after, and how their opinions vary, it hardly gives any insight on why the citizens change their opinions—and what it means—after the learning process.¹⁸ This question is

¹⁵ Fishkin, "Consulting the public through deliberative polling."

¹⁶ For instance, other similar methods of public consultation combining representation and deliberation, are the “Choice questionnaire” and “Televote”. The former is a questionnaire, which is given to a random sample, but with information relevant to each question; for more information, see Peter Neijens, *The choice questionnaire: Design and evaluation of an instrument for collecting more informed opinions of a population* (Amsterdam: Free University Press, 1987). The latter sends respondents a briefing document after a telephone survey and then calls them back at a later time; for more information, see Christa Daryl Slaton, *Televote : expanding citizen participation in the quantum age* (New York: Praeger, 1992).

¹⁷ Although deliberative polling combines quantitative and qualitative features—as shown below, I use quantitative deliberative polling to refer to Fishkin and Luskin’s deliberative polling because it emphasizes more the quantitative treatment of the data. By contrast, the—qualitative—deliberative polling proposed here stresses more the qualitative features.

¹⁸ This paper does not assess the methodology of deliberative polling in itself; rather it emphasizes the qualitative aspect of it as well as adds a comparative approach. For discussions about deliberative polling, see, e.g., James S.

especially important in topics where little change of opinions may be expected such as political preferences and identities. Conducting qualitative *and* quantitative deliberative polling in those cases seem to offer the best result since the quantitative aspect provides a general picture of the change of opinions while the qualitative aspect endeavors to understand the change of opinions. However, quantitative deliberative polling already displays qualitative features. Indeed,

[t]he participants spend the largest portion of the working time on-site in groups of ten to fifteen or twenty, led by trained moderators, to discuss the probable consequences of the various policy proposals and how those consequences should be weighed. Random assignment, following on random sampling, means that the discussions feature a far wider variety of perspectives than most participants are likely to encounter in real life, where they talk mostly with others very like themselves. The moderators also help ensure that competing arguments are heard, again to a degree rare or unknown in real life.¹⁹

Therefore, what is advocated here is the qualitative treatment—in addition to the quantitative treatment—of the data generated by deliberative polling in order to apprehend more finely the nature of the change of opinions. In fact, Fishkin and Luskin's treatment of deliberative polling's data relies mainly on quantitative analyses.²⁰ Thus, I argue that much attention should be given to the interpretation of the data collected in the focus groups as well as in the interaction between the participants and the experts.

Nonetheless, unless the organizers of the deliberative polls can afford a proper twofold—quantitative and qualitative—treatment of the data, the emphasis on the qualitative analysis is likely to imply the need to reduce the sample's size. This is an important trade-off, especially since deliberative polling relies much on a dual aspiration: deliberative or more informed opinion from a scientific random sample. However, in the case of a doctoral research, the high cost of

Fishkin and Robert C. Luskin, "The Deliberative Poll: A Reply to Our Critics," *Public Perspective*, no. 7 (1996), James S. Fishkin et al., "ChoiceDialogues and deliberative polls: Two approaches to deliberative democracy," *National Civic Review* 93, no. 4 (2004), Kasper M. Hansen and Vibeke Normann Andersen, "The Deliberative Poll: Opinion formation in the experimental context of Deliberative Polling," in *The Annual Meetings of the American Political Science Association* (San Francisco: 2001), Vincent Price and Peter Neijens, "Deliberative Polls: Toward Improved Measures of 'Informed' Public Opinion?," *International Journal of Public Opinion Research* 10, no. 2 (1998).

¹⁹ Luskin, Fishkin, and Jowell, "Considered Opinions: Deliberative Polling in Britain," 459.

²⁰ See, for instance, *Ibid.*: 456-78.

probability sampling has to be taken into account. Deliberative polling is very expensive, indeed. Although costs vary and “are very context dependent (they depend on duration, location, and whether participants travel and accommodations are required)”, they “can range anywhere from a few hundred thousand dollars to upwards of a million dollars.”²¹ To be sure, even a few hundred thousand of dollars is a large amount of money to be collected by a PhD student. On this background and in addition to the arguments for a more qualitative focus given above, the turn to a more qualitatively orientated deliberative approach seems to make even more sense.

Finally, thus far, no comparative deliberative polling has been undertaken. Deliberative polls have been held on a wide variety of issues, ranging from crime policy or the death penalty to Britain’s future in Europe or the Euro in Denmark via the reconciliation with the aboriginals in Australia. However, no attempts have been made to organized deliberative polls in two or more different countries on the same issue. Such a comparative deliberative polling experience is at the heart of my doctoral work, which is explained in the following sections.

DELIBERATIVE POLLING AND FEDERALISM IN BELGIUM AND CANADA

Two old parliamentary democracies, Belgium and Canada display very definite differences—their geography, demography and history, their political regime, their federalism and its internal dynamic, to mention but a few. Yet, they share similar political features, patterns as well as tensions. Indeed, “both Canada and Belgium stand for the harmonious cohabitation of cultures, and both advocate a fair balance between common interests and separate interests.”²² Their political regime combines *shared-rule* and *self-rule*, the cornerstone of federalism.²³ What’s more, their federalism has been shaped by the attempt to deal with the deep division

²¹ Elliott, "Participatory Methods Toolkit: A practitioner’s manual. Deliberative Polling®," 106.

²² Gérald-A. Beaudoin, Armand De Decker, and Francis Delpérée, "Canadian and Belgian Federalism," *Canadian Parliamentary Review* 22, no. 4 (1999): 1.

²³ Daniel J. Elazar, *Exploring federalism* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1987).

between the two main ethno-linguistic communities.²⁴ On this regard, they may be qualified as multinational federations.²⁵

Until now, students of Belgian and Canadian federalism have devoted most of their attention to the institutions or to the study of identities, not to mention the more theoretical or philosophical works.²⁶ Little work has been undertaken on the relationship between perception (understood as knowledge, identity, and legitimacy) of the federal government and the evolution of the regime—even though many works and most of the surveys address the latter point. Thus, what is proposed here is to explore, with deliberative polling, the relationship between the citizens' *perception* of the federal government in Belgium and Canada and their federal *preferences* vis-à-vis the evolution of the regime. This analysis will illuminate from a citizen's perspective (or better citizens' perspectives) the dynamic of the Belgian and Canadian federalism.

²⁴ On Belgium, see, e.g., Benoît Bayenet, Henri Capron, and Philippe Liégeois, eds., *L'espace Wallonie-Bruxelles : voyage au bout de la Belgique*, Economie, société, région (Bruxelles: De Boeck & Larcier, 2007), Jaak Billiet, Bart Maddens, and André-Paul Frogner, "Does Belgium (still) exist? Differences in political culture between Flemings and Walloons," *West European Politics* 29, no. 5 (2006), Xavier Mabilie, *Histoire politique de la Belgique : facteurs et acteurs de changement*, 4ème ed. (Bruxelles: CRISP, 2000), Wilfried Swenden, Marleen Brans, and Lieven De Winter, "The politics of Belgium: Institutions and policy under bipolar and centrifugal federalism," *West European Politics* 29, no. 5 (2006). For more information on Canada, see, e.g., Alain Gagnon, *Québec : state and society*, 3rd ed. (Peterborough, Ont. ; Orchard Park, N.Y.: Broadview Press, 2004), Alain Gagnon, *Le fédéralisme canadien contemporain : fondements, traditions, institutions* (Montréal: Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 2006), Manon Tremblay and Réjean Pelletier, eds., *Le parlementarisme canadien*, 3ème ed. (Québec: Presses de l'Université Laval, 2005), André Bernard, *Vie politique au Canada* (Sainte-Foy: Presses de l'Université du Québec, 2005).

²⁵ On this concept, see, e.g., Michael Burgess and John Pinder, *Multinational federations* (New York: Routledge, 2007), Alain Gagnon, François Rocher, and Montserrat Guibernau, *The conditions of diversity in multinational democracies* (Montreal: Institute for Research on Public Policy (IRPP), 2003), Alain Gagnon and James Tully, *Multinational democracies* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), Michael Keating, *Plurinational democracy : stateless nations in a post-sovereignty era* (Oxford, England ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), Arend Lijphart, *Patterns of democracy : government forms and performance in thirty-six countries* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), Ferran Requejo, *Democracy and national pluralism*, Routledge innovations in political theory (London ; New York: Routledge, 2001), Ferran Requejo, "Value pluralism and multinational federalism," *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 50, no. 1 (2004), Kenneth McRoberts, "Canada and the multinational state," *Canadian Journal of Political Science-Revue Canadienne De Science Politique* 34, no. 4 (2001).

²⁶ Since the list of references on these issues may be quite long, only a few illustrative and general references are given: Michael Burgess, "Ethnicity, Nationalism and Identity in Canada-Quebec Relations," *Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics* 24, no. 2 (1996), Dimitrios Karmis and Alain- G. Gagnon, "Fédéralisme et identités collectives au Canada et en Belgique: des itinéraires différents, une fragmentation similaire," *Canadian Journal of Political Science / Revue canadienne de science politique* 29, no. 3 (1996), Johanne Poirier, "Formal Mechanisms of Intergovernmental Relations in Belgium," *Regional and Federal Studies* 12, no. 3 (2002), Ronald L. Watts, *Comparing federal systems*, 2nd ed. (Montreal ; Ithaca: Published for the School of Policy Studies, Queen's University by McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999).

Several questions can be raised. Is there any relationship between knowledge of the federal government and political preferences? Do informed opinions change the political attitudes? Who change opinions? What relationship is there, if any, between the legitimacy of the federal government and the political preferences? Which identities are shared by the citizens of the same countries, and to what extent? Is there any relationship between identities and political preferences? The answers to these questions will enable me to *compare* and *categorize* the attitudes and preferences within and between groups in Belgium and Canada. Two main *hypotheses* guide the research. On the one hand, a change in perception (most likely in knowledge) will modify the preferences or, at least, will generate preferences where none existed before. On the other hand, the preferences of citizens who had strong preferences before the deliberative poll will not be modified even if the level of their knowledge changes. Next to these two main patterns, I expect to find several other combinations of attitudes (for instance, people who change their perception of the other community and thus change their political preferences or the respondents whose perceptions and preferences remain the same).

FOUR DELIBERATIVE POLLS

To collect the data, four deliberative polls will be organized: the first one in French-speaking Belgium in September 2007, the second and third ones respectively in Quebec and in Ontario in May-June 2008, and the fourth one in Flemish-speaking Belgium in November 2008. A hundred citizens will gather for each deliberative event, which will last only for one day—a Saturday.²⁷ At the beginning of the day, after a few words of introduction, the participants answer a survey with questions. Then, the gathering alternates small groups and large sessions where experts address the issue and answer questions raised by the participants. At the end of the event,

²⁷ Fishkin and Luskin's deliberative polls usually take place during a whole week-end. The participants meet from Friday evening until midday Sunday. For more information, see, *e.g.*, Elliott, "Participatory Methods Toolkit: A practitioner's manual. Deliberative Polling®.", Fishkin, "Consulting the public through deliberative polling."

the citizens take the same questionnaire as the one they answered at the beginning. Thus, this methodology combines both quantitative—the pre- and the post-questionnaire—and qualitative—the focus groups and the interaction with the experts—methods. Before turning to a more detailed analysis of the methodology, we need to discuss the practical details of the deliberative polls

The sample is not a scientific random sample—because of the cost. In Belgium, the sample will be drawn through an invitation sent to official (e)-mailing lists as well as to personal (e)-mailing lists. However, stratified sampling will be applied in order to have a balanced sample around at least three different variables: gender, age, and type of work. In Canada, random sampling might be used; in this case, four thousand invitations, per deliberative poll, will be mailed to a random sample in order to finally draw a sample of a hundred citizens.²⁸ Moreover, in participatory experiences in general and in deliberative polls in particular, participants' expenses (board and travel expenses) are fully covered and they are usually paid an *honorarium* for their participation (on the order of 100–150 EUR).²⁹ For the Belgian events, since the distances are not so long and in order to reduce the expenses, participants' travel expenses will not be covered. In Canada, transportation might be compensated (on the order of 40–50 CAD). In both cases, a catering service will offer participants food and drinks all day long; however, no *honorarium* will be paid. Finally, the four events will be most likely held in university premises: at the *Université de Liège*, *Vrije Universiteit Brussel*, *Université de Montréal*, and Queen's University.

QUANTITATIVE METHODS IN DELIBERATIVE POLLING

There is a dual assumption at the core of deliberative polling: public opinions are largely uninformed and information (or in Fishkin and Luskin's term *deliberation*) does matter in the formation of opinions. Since World War II, scholars in various fields of the social sciences have

²⁸ The cost of sampling—only, i.e. not counting the cost of mailing—can be evaluated at 3.000 EUR per sample.

²⁹ According to Janice Elliott, the cost for transportation and lodgings can range anywhere from 10.000 to 100.000 EUR, see Elliott, "Participatory Methods Toolkit: A practitioner's manual. Deliberative Polling®," 107.

shown how little most of the citizens know about politics.³⁰ More recently, in the United States Michael X. Delli Carpini and Scott Keeter or Vincent Price have offered macabre examples of information not widely known.³¹ In Belgium, in a recent survey, Bernard Fournier, Alexia Pironet, and I found out that only 60 % of the 1437 surveyed students (16 to 18 years old) knew the name of the Belgian Prime Minister, Guy Verhofstadt at the time.³² The score for the Walloon Minister-President is even lower: only 42.5 % of the sample knew Elio Di Rupo was the right answer.³³ The general knowledge in the rest of the population is not better, as shown by national-wide surveys.³⁴

Against this background, there is an ongoing debate in the literature about the consequences of this absence of informed public opinions. On the one hand, some authors claim that “this widespread ignorance does not actually make much difference.”³⁵ In this stream of research, two claims are made:

The stronger is that the great majority of people somehow manage by cognitive heuristics or other shortcuts to grope their way to the same policy preferences they would hold if they were well informed. The weaker claim is that while many *individuals* do not hold the same policy preferences as they would do if they were well informed, their errors cancel out in the aggregate, so that the *distribution* of policy preferences is essentially the same as it would be if everyone were well informed.³⁶

³⁰ For instance, we discussed above the contribution of Converse and Downs on this issue, see Converse, "The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics.", Downs, *An economic theory of democracy*.

³¹ Michael X. Delli Carpini and Scott Keeter, *What Americans know about politics and why it matters* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), Vincent Price, "Political Information," in *Measures of Political Attitudes*, ed. John P. Robinson, Phillip R. Shaver, and Lawrence S. Wrightsman (New York: Academic Press, 1999).

³² The question was « Le premier ministre du gouvernement fédéral belge est... A) Elio Di Rupo B) Yves Leterme C) Johan Vande Lanotte D) Guy Verhofstadt E) Je ne sais pas » (The Prime Minister of the Belgian federal government is... A) Elio Di Rupo B) Yves Leterme C) Johan Vande Lanotte D) Guy Verhofstadt E) I don't know).

³³ The question was « Le ministre-président de la Région Wallonne est... A) Marie Arena B) André Antoine C) Guy Verhofstadt D) Elio Di Rupo E) Je ne sais pas » (The Minister-President of the Walloon Region is... A) Marie Arena B) André Antoine C) Guy Verhofstadt D) Elio Di Rupo E) I don't know).

³⁴ This is not a value-judgment. It is rather an observation. Deliberative polling has been thought to remediate, to some extent, to this situation.

³⁵ Luskin, Fishkin, and Jowell, "Considered Opinions: Deliberative Polling in Britain," 457.

³⁶ Ibid.: 458.

On the other hand, other authors believe information *does* matter both at the individual and the aggregate level. Relying on previous experiences of deliberative polling³⁷, I posit that deliberation matters. Thus, in my own quasi-experiments, the quantitative analyses intend to grasp the change of opinions between the pre- and the post-questionnaire, which are identical.

The questionnaire is divided into two main sections: one measures the perception of the federal government and the other one measures the political preferences vis-à-vis the evolution of the regime. The section on perception relies on a four-fold division of the concept *perception*. First, questions related to the *knowledge* of the federal government are asked such as who is the Prime Minister of the federal government? Which government is in charge of the education? Which government spends most money? Second, there are several questions about the *legitimacy* of the federal government: for instance, do you think the federal government has too much power? From which level of government do you feel you get the most for your money?³⁸ How often do you contact the federal administration? Does the federal government protect the minorities? Questions on trust and confidence are also added. Third, *identities* are also measured: Do you feel Walloon (or Flemish, Québécois, Canadian, depending on the case)? Are proud of being...? Do you think the Belgian (or...) are united or divided? Are you prouder of being... or...? Fourth, last round of questions concern the perception of the *other* community: Do you think [the other community] (be it the Flemish, the Walloons, the English-speaking Canadians or the Québécois) is united or divided? Is passive or active? Is dominant or dominated? Do you believe [the other community] is a nation, distinct from the rest of the country? How many people

³⁷ See the general references about deliberative polling given at the beginning of the paper.

³⁸ Richard L. Cole, John Kincaid, and Andrew Parkin, "Public Opinion on Federalism in the United States and Canada in 2002: The Aftermath of Terrorism," *Publius: The Journal of Federalism* 32, no. 4 (2002), Richard L. Cole, John Kincaid, and Alejandro Rodriguez, "Public Opinion on Federalism and Federal Political Culture in Canada, Mexico, and the United States, 2004," *Publius: The Journal of Federalism* 34, no. 3 (2004), John Kincaid et al., "Public Opinion on Federalism in Canada, Mexico, and the United States in 2003," *Publius: The Journal of Federalism* 33, no. 3 (2003).

of [the other community] do you personally know? Do you think people from [the other community] are dramatically different than people from [your community]? On top of these batches of questions, several questions concentrate on a potential federal political culture: A federal form of government in which power is divided between a national government and state/provincial and local governments, is preferable to any other kind of government?³⁹ A country in which everyone speaks the same language and has similar ethic and religious backgrounds is preferable to a country in which people speak different languages and have different ethnic and religious backgrounds?⁴⁰ Helping poorer Regions (or provinces) is important?

The second section of the questionnaire addresses the *preferences* towards the future of the federal system. Do you believe [the country] should be split in two or more independent countries? More power should be given to the federal state? According to you, does the federal state take too much power from the Regions (or provinces)? Should [your country] take a unitary form? Do you think [the country] should become a Republic? Since World War II in Canada, since the 1970's in Belgium, similar questions have repeatedly been asked to the citizens. Therefore, the results can be compared longitudinally. In total, the questionnaire will be made of 100–150 questions.⁴¹

The results will be analyzed at two levels. At the micro level, usual quantitative methods, in particular statistical methods used by researchers working with small-N data such as in

³⁹ Cole, Kincaid, and Parkin, "Public Opinion on Federalism in the United States and Canada in 2002: The Aftermath of Terrorism.", Cole, Kincaid, and Rodriguez, "Public Opinion on Federalism and Federal Political Culture in Canada, Mexico, and the United States, 2004.", Kincaid et al., "Public Opinion on Federalism in Canada, Mexico, and the United States in 2003."

⁴⁰ Cole, Kincaid, and Parkin, "Public Opinion on Federalism in the United States and Canada in 2002: The Aftermath of Terrorism.", Cole, Kincaid, and Rodriguez, "Public Opinion on Federalism and Federal Political Culture in Canada, Mexico, and the United States, 2004.", Kincaid et al., "Public Opinion on Federalism in Canada, Mexico, and the United States in 2003."

⁴¹ The questionnaire will be tested in two ways. On September 20, 2007 a hundred students will take it and it will also be read by survey experts in different fields of the social sciences.

psychology, will be used; that is, analysis of variance, comparison of means, etc. If there are any, the possible changes in perception (knowledge, legitimacy, identities, and perception of the others) will be measured. The following step will be to gauge the changes of opinions: what are the changes and who changed? At the macro level, I shall use ascending hierarchical clustering in order to identify classes (or profiles of answers): for instance, the citizens who did not know much about federalism and improved a lot their knowledge but whose political preferences did change dramatically or the citizens who were well-informed and did not change their preferences. Several classes might be drawn from the sample. Here, the two main hypotheses will be tested—on the one hand, the group of citizens whose perception's changes provokes preferences' change or creation and, on the other hand, the group of citizens whose strong preferences are not modified regardless of changes in perception. Furthermore, those classes will be compared *within* each group (i.e. each deliberative poll) as well as *between* the—four—groups. This will generate a fine portray of the various perceptions and preferences of the federal system in Belgium and in Canada. This picture will, then, be refined with the analysis of the qualitative data.

QUALITATIVE METHODS IN DELIBERATIVE POLLING

The qualitative aspect, which I emphasized in my methodology, relies on the textual analysis of the focus groups' discussions and the interaction between participants and the experts.⁴² After taking the pre-questionnaire, the citizens are randomly assigned to eight focus

⁴² For information on focus groups, see, e.g., Jenny Kitzinger and Rosaline S. Barbour, *Developing focus group research : politics, theory, and practice* (London ; Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 1999), Nikki Slocum, "Méthodes participatives. Un guide pour l'utilisateur. Focus groupe." ed Brigitte Duvieusart, et al. (Place Published: Fondation Roi Baudouin et Vlaams Instituut voor Wetenschappelijk en Technologisch Aspectenonderzoek (viWTA), 2005, David W. Stewart, Prem N. Shamdasani, and Dennis W. Rook, *Focus groups : theory and practice*, 2nd ed., Applied social research methods series (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, [1990] 2007), Thomas L. Greenbaum, *The handbook for focus group research*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1998), David L. Morgan, *Focus groups as qualitative research*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, [1988] 1997), Lia Litosseliti, *Using focus groups in research*, Continuum research methods series (London ; New York: Continuum, 2003), Judith Langer, *The mirrored window : focus groups from a moderator's point of view* (Ithaca, N.Y.: PMP, 2001), Richard A. Krueger and Mary Anne Casey, *Focus groups : a practical guide for applied research*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, [1988] 2000), Thomas L. Greenbaum, *Moderating focus groups : a*

groups (between eight to fifteen participants per group). In total, they spend four moments in small groups.⁴³ Each group is led by a trained moderator and observed by a silent researcher. During the first moment (90'), after a few words of introduction by the moderator, the participants introduce themselves and converse about how they perceive the federal government. This first moment is followed by the first plenary session where two university professors (one from each community) address the issue of federalism: its origins, its structure, its dynamic, and its future. The purpose of the two twenty-minute-each-speeches is to give the participants a broad overview of the issues at stake, i.e. to enhance their knowledge about federalism. Following the two interventions, the participants are invited to raise questions.

During the second moment (45') in small groups, the participants exchange on what they learnt from the experts. To enrich the discussions, the moderators can bring in questions from the survey. After 45 minutes, the citizens assemble again in a large session to listen to two former federal ministers (again one from each community). The formula is the same as for the first round of experts, they talk for twenty minutes each and, then, the floor is open for questions from the public. The speakers particularly speak about the federal relations and the politics in the federal government. Here, the emphasis is not so much on knowledge than on politics. The idea is to give

practical guide for group facilitation (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 2000), Rose Barbour, *Doing focus groups* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2007), David L. Morgan, Richard A. Krueger, and Jean A. King, *Focus group kit*, 6 vols. (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: SAGE Publications, 1998), David L. Morgan, *Successful focus groups : advancing the state of the art* (Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1993), Claudia Puchta and Jonathan Potter, *Focus group practice* (London ; Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 2004), Michael Bloor, *Focus groups in social research*, *Introducing qualitative methods* (London ; Thousand Oaks, Calif.: SAGE Publications, 2001), Ivana Marková, *Dialogue in focus groups : exploring socially shared knowledge* (London ; Oakville, CT: Equinox Pub., 2007).

⁴³ The usual schedule for a deliberative poll is as follows: "On Friday evening, the participants spent 45 minutes in plenary session being welcomed, watching a brief documentary describing the issues they would be discussing, and being reminded of what lay before them. On Saturday, they spent three-and-a-half hours in small group discussions, then three hours in large group exchanges with panels of experts fielding questions, then another hour back in the small groups. On Sunday, they spent two hours in a plenary session questioning MPs representing each of the three major parties, then one last hour in the small groups. At the very end, they filled out the same self-administered questionnaire they had completed during the initial interview," Luskin, Fishkin, and Jowell, "Considered Opinions: Deliberative Polling in Britain," 463.

a fair idea of how politics works at the highest level of the state and what are the issues at stake, especially those related to the evolution of the federal system. After this plenary session, participants gather in small groups for 45 minutes in order to debrief the previous moment and to prepare questions for the final expert. This last expert, a journalist, engages the evolution of the federalism in front of the whole group. She or he endeavors to clarify the outcomes of the possible political reforms. When he or she is done, participants raise their last questions (more time is devoted to questions). Finally, they go back to their small groups for a final hour of discussions. During this fourth moment, the main topic is the potential changes of perception (knowledge, legitimacy, identity, and perception of the others) and of preferences. At the end of that moment, they answer again the questionnaire. A few words of thanks conclude the event.

The deliberative poll is a quite intense formula; it starts at 9:00 AM and it ends at 6:30 PM. However, throughout the day, coffee breaks and a lunch break will offer rest time to the participants. Beside these practical details, all the dialogues and speeches will be recorded and later be transcribed into a textual form. The moderators, who have already led focus groups, as well as the silent observers, shall be trained in advance. Focus groups guidelines will also be given. These guidelines will be tested on several groups of students and on citizens a few weeks before the event. Moreover, the speakers will receive a preliminary version of the question six weeks before the event in order to prepare their speech accordingly. If possible, the experts will talk on the two panels of the same country.

The transcripts from the focus groups' discussions and the interaction with experts will be carefully analyzed in order to understand the nature of the changes of both perceptions and preferences; i.e. why some people change their perceptions and/or preferences and why some

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don't. To do so, qualitative content analysis will be mobilized.⁴⁴ This analysis "consists of maintaining the systematic nature of content analysis of the various stages of qualitative analysis, without undertaking over-hasty quantifications."⁴⁵ While the quantitative aspect of deliberative polling catches the big picture—what people think before and after and how their opinions vary, the qualitative treatment of the discussions should insight on why the citizens change their opinions and, above all, what it means after the learning process. Such an analysis is especially important in order to research question; that is, to explore the relationship between the perception of the federal government by Belgians and Canadians citizens and their federal preferences vis-à-vis the evolution of the regime. Indeed, the qualitative content analysis complements well the ascending hierarchical clustering, used in the treatment of the quantitative data. To be sure, interesting findings about the citizens' perceptions and preferences will be drawn from this comparative deliberative polling.

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The modern Western democratic state is currently under much pressure, at least from two perspectives. The first pressure is inherent to its democratic character: in an era of globalization and 'scientisation'⁴⁶ of the world, how can the democratic representative system cope with these dramatics changes? Since the government and its traditional apparatus seem unfit to deal with the developments of the modern society, citizens have aspired to be reintegrated into the political process more than once every four years. From these claims have emerged participatory and

⁴⁴ See, e.g., Philipp Mayring, "Qualitative Content Analysis," *Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 1, no. 2 (2000), <http://www.qualitative-research.net/fqs-texte/2-00/2-00mayring-e>, Philipp Mayring, "Qualitative Content Analysis," in *A companion to qualitative research*, ed. Uwe Flick, Ernst von Kardorff, and Ines Steinke (London ; Thousand Oaks, Calif.: SAGE, 2004).

⁴⁵ Mayring, "Qualitative Content Analysis," 266.

⁴⁶ By 'scientisation', I mean the increasingly important role played by the scientific world on the whole world. This importance brings along new risks which are radically different from the risks known until now. Ulrich Beck has been one of the foreseers of this dramatic change of society, see, e.g., Ulrich Beck, *Risk society : towards a new modernity* (London ; Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1992), Ulrich Beck, *World risk society* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 1999).

deliberative procedures. Amongst them, deliberative polling seems to be one of the most ambitious based on a dual aspiration—deliberative opinions from a scientific random sample. The second pressure on the democratic state is both external and internal: this is the demands for the delegation of power to international—sometimes supranational—organizations and to decentralized—or better, non-centralized⁴⁷—entities. The latter movement reflects, as in the case of Belgium and Canada, claims for more autonomy by some peoples who feel increasingly uncomfortable in the current form of the state that they have inhabited for many years but not without troubles.

In this context, using deliberative polling to explore the correlations between how Belgian and Canadian citizens perceive their federal government and how they would like it to evolve makes much sense. Indeed, this important question is dealt in an innovative way. What's more, deliberative polling, as suggested some fifteen years ago by Fishkin and Luskin, has been modified to apprehend in a finer manner the complex reality of a highly-divided society. Following the advice of triangulation recommended by Abbas Tashakkori and Charles Teddlie⁴⁸, I propose a dialectic argument which combines quantitative and qualitative methods in order to enlighten the research question in such a way that each method separately could not achieve. In fact, relying on quantitative (from the pre- and post-questionnaire) and qualitative (from the focus groups and the interaction participants-experts) data offers nuanced answers as how opinions change, why they change, and what this means.

Moreover, a comparative flavor is added to deliberative polling. Four deliberative polls are organized on the same issue in four different settings: French-speaking and Flemish-speaking

⁴⁷ Elazar, *Exploring federalism*.

⁴⁸ Abbas Tashakkori and Charles Teddlie, *Mixed methodology : combining qualitative and quantitative approaches*, Applied social research methods series (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 1998), Abbas Tashakkori and Charles Teddlie, *Handbook of mixed methods in social & behavioral research* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: SAGE Publications, 2003).

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Belgium, French-speaking and English-speaking Canada. Thus, a comparison within and between the groups is possible. Above all, this quasi-experiment is conducted by a graduate student without much financial resources—while the organization of usual deliberative polling costs up to a million of dollars. Finally, a mixed qualitative and quantitative deliberative polling is both an interesting way to collect data and an easy means to involve citizens in political life, in general, and in social sciences research, in particular.

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