Assessing participant change two years later: A supplement to “Evaluating the Quality and Effects of Deliberative Governance: A Case Study of the 2012 Oregon Citizens’ Initiative Review”

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Assessing Participant Change Two Years Later

The main body of this report addresses how participants spoke about changes to their civic identity, both during the event and shortly after. To further assess how participants may have changed, however, we conducted an additional follow-up study two years after the 2012 CIR to understand whether participants’ political attitudes and actions had altered as a result of their experience. This study contained both quantitative survey measures as well as qualitative responses to open-ended questions about their experiences since participation. The former provides a more objective view of long-term change. Rather than providing self-reports of change, we look to see if their response to survey questions differed before and after the event. The latter provides a more subjective sense of change and seeks to understand how participants talked about their political attitudes and action two years out from the CIR.

The surveys were distributed online, over the phone, and via email between October and December 2014. Panelists were asked standard questions of internal (3 items; α = .732, M = 3.86, SD = .60) and external efficacy (3 items; α = .684, M = 3.35, SD = .73). In addition, we created scale measures to determine deliberative efficacy, asking questions such as, “The first step in solving our common problems is to discuss them together,” and, “Groups of citizens can think intelligently about politics” (6 items; α = .718, M = 4.05, SD = .48) as well as questions about deliberative skills, which assessed whether they “listen respectfully to those with different opinions” and “keep an open mind regarding political matters” (6 items; α = .545, M = 1.46, SD = .34). Panelists were also asked items about their sense of community identity, including whether they were “proud to be an Oregonian” and whether “being an Oregonian” was an important part of their identity (2 items; α = .743, M = 4.19, SD = .75). Finally, panelists were asked about their community engagement, such as how often they had “discussed local community affairs” or “organized a local forum or meeting” in the past six months (7 items; α = .683, M = 1.95, SD = .51).

Deliberative Skills inputs

Before determining whether or not participants expressed change, we address what demographic factors influenced panelists’ political attitudes and actions prior to deliberation. On the two-year-later survey, panelists were asked a number of demographic questions, including age, gender, race, income, education, and party affiliation. In addition, we gauged panelists’ political interest

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1 This study was originally intended to be a one-year later follow-up survey, but because of the government shutdown in the Fall of 2013, the project was postponed. Our fear was that participants’ views about the government shutdown might interfere with our understanding of the CIR’s effect on political attitudes and actions. The delay gave the further advantage of allowing the post survey to be conducted during the 2014 elections, when the second official CIR took place in Oregon, which likely spurred panelists’ to think about their own experience at the 2012 CIR.
2 The survey had a response rate of 58 percent after attempting to contact all 2012 participants multiple times. If we exclude those cases where mail surveys were returned (participants had changed addresses and left no forwarding address) and were not reachable via telephone or email, the response rate increases to 67 percent.
3 All descriptive statistics of scale items are taken from pre-survey measurements.
and their political knowledge.\textsuperscript{4} We then looked to see whether any of these variables were correlated with panelists’ incoming levels of deliberative efficacy, deliberative skills, community identity, and community engagement.

Looking first to measures of deliberative efficacy and skills, we found that deliberative efficacy was correlated with gender, $r(46) = -0.291$, $p < .05$. In other words, women were more likely than men to think that deliberation was a legitimate form of problem solving prior to their CIR experience. Turning to deliberative skills, we find that political knowledge is highly correlated with incoming deliberative skills, though not in the direction that one might assume. Higher levels of political knowledge was actually correlated with lower levels of pre-CIR deliberative skills $r(25) = -0.452$, $p < .05$.

When assessing the relationship between community identity and demographic variables, we found that race was strongly correlated with a sense of connection to the Oregon community. Non-whites were less likely to say that they were proud to be an Oregonian or that they considered Oregon an important part of their identity than whites, $r(38) = -0.432$, $p < .01$. Finally, political interest was correlated with community engagement, though again, not in the expected direction. High levels of political interest were actually correlated with lower levels of community engagement, $r(25) = -0.463$, $p < .05$.

\textbf{Changes to political attitudes and actions}

Having established what influenced panelists’ pre-existing political attitudes and actions, we next assess how participants’ attitudes and actions changed as a result of their participation. We asked participants in the pre-survey as well as the post-survey standard questions regarding their internal, external, and deliberative efficacy, deliberative skills, community identity, and community engagement. To assess whether participants experienced change along any of these measures, we ran paired-sample t-tests which ask whether there is a significant difference in panelists’ pre and post responses.

When the data was explored this way, we found very little evidence of change. The one exception to this was trustworthiness, $t(26) = -2.53$, $p < .05$. Figure S.1 illustrates the results, showing that panelists were more likely to agree that “other people are generally trustworthy” after participation.

\textsuperscript{4} Political knowledge was measured using a two item scale that asked panelists who has the ability to decide if a law is constitutional and what is the primary duty of the U.S. Congress, with don’t know coded as incorrect (0-2 scale, $\alpha = .707$, $M = 1.46$, $SD = .79$).
Figure S1. Panelists’ assessment that “other people are generally trustworthy.”

Two things may account for lack of change when measured this way. The first is the small sample size. Only 28 participants took part in the follow-up survey. This small sample size diminishes the likelihood of finding change using this method. Studies of the 2014 CIRs, which utilized many of the same measures and had a sample size of 120 participants, may yield more significant results. A related factor may be the high correlation between panelists’ pre- and post-responses to these questions. In almost every case, the panelists’ pre- and post-responses were highly correlated with one another. In other words, panelists often responded the same way in both the pre and post survey. Because these questions ask panelists to assess things like efficacy along a five point scale, there might not be enough variation in the scale to find much change with a small sample size, even if panelists did experience a sense of change. For example, a panelists might agree that, “There are many legal ways for citizens to successfully influence government” (a measure of external efficacy), prior to their participation. Post participation, they may provide the same response even if in conversation they express feelings of change along this item.

Indeed, the findings presented in the main body of this report and the panelists’ responses to the qualitative questions in the two-year later follow-up survey bear this out. In interviews soon after the 2012 process, we found that panelists expressed increasing feelings of internal and external efficacy. They reported “sympathy and empathy” for their legislators. They appreciated the difficulty of their jobs and were pleased that the legislature had instituted the CIR. Moreover, they often talked about gaining deliberative skills and utilizing them in their daily lives, changing the ways that they talked about politics and becoming more involved in their local communities as a result of their CIR experience.
Many of these same findings were evident in their qualitative responses to the two-year-later survey. Panelists expressed an increased sense of external efficacy, or government responsiveness. As one panelist noted, “I never had a microphone and chance to feel powerful about my opinion before. It was an amazing experience!!” Another stated simply that, “It's made me more hopeful of our political future.” Many of the panelists expressed similar sentiments. As one panelist said, the CIR illustrated “that it is possible for an average citizen to have influence in the decision making process!”

Aside from these changes to external efficacy, many panelists discussed the acquisition and utilization of deliberative skills two years after their participation. One panelists said that he “leave[s himself] with an open mind until I know all about an issue” as a result of his experience. Another noted that because of the CIR, he had “been willing to look at positives going on in current government, having a more full understanding of how two sides can be equally valid so I have less negative judgment about things and more curiosity and interest at what may be motivating the opposing view.” Several panelists reported that they had learned to keep an open mind and listen to opposing arguments because of the CIR and that they utilized these skills in their daily lives. As one panelist said, the CIR helped with:

Learning how to think the issue through. Hearing the other side really helped me see how I can make biased automatic judgments. The review helped draw out the pros and cons to make more informed decisions… I am so grateful for this idea, I am tired of not knowing the whole truth when I make decisions, it is more like gambling without things like CIR.

Finally, as with their responses to the short-term interviews, several panelists reported becoming more involved in their local communities as a result of the CIR. One noted that he utilized his deliberative skills in his position on city council and another said that he was still working with his high school alumni association, a change he directly attributed to learning about education funding through the CIR. As one participant said, “It helped me to see how important it is to be open to being involved in one's community and the issues that we are faced with.”

Even so, some panelists reported that the process did not affect their political attitudes and actions, saying that, “It had no effect on me,” or that “It really had no effect on the way I think about government or the people.” In a few cases, however, panelists explained why they hadn’t felt change, generally because they were already politically involved before the CIR or that they already had deliberative skills before their participation. For example, one panelist said that, “I was involved and ready to discuss things before, still am afterward. If I hadn't already been involved in political organizations before the CIR, I would definitely have found myself changed and more interested in my community.”

**Influence of Satisfaction on Change**

Our last set of analyses asks if satisfaction with the CIR influenced whether panelists reported changes to their political attitudes or actions. Here, we relied on two measures of satisfaction:
panelists’ overall satisfaction with the process and whether they felt they had “learned enough to reach a good decision” about the measure in question. To test for the effects of these two variables on change, we tested to see if either satisfaction or having learned enough were correlated with differences in pre and post attitudinal and behavioral scores.

Again, we find relatively few changes when accounting for panelists’ satisfaction, likely due to the reasons mentioned above of small sample sizes and highly correlated pre and post scores. Even so, we do find a number of ways that satisfaction influenced panelists’ attitudinal or behavioral change, particularly if we include those correlations that approached significance.

For example, we saw no relationship between satisfaction and external efficacy when looking at the overall scale, but when broken down to its component items, higher levels of satisfaction approached significant correlation with a decrease in believing that, “People like me don’t have any say about what the government does,” $r(24) = .336, p < .10$. Overall satisfaction additionally approached significant correlation with changes to panelists’ deliberative efficacy, with higher levels of satisfaction correlating with increases along that measure, $r(26) = .358, p < .10$. Having learned enough information to make a good decision had similar effects on deliberative efficacy, with those reporting having learned enough more likely to see increases in their belief that deliberation was a legitimate form of problem solving, $r(25) = .359, p < .10$.

Conclusions

Although we found some change along some items, particularly trustworthiness and deliberative efficacy, we found relatively few indicators of change when we assessed these measures quantitatively. When looked at from a qualitative perspective, however, panelists reported a number of changes to their efficacy and deliberative skills. The discrepancy between these two sets of findings provides insight into how we study participant effects. As has been noted elsewhere, a panelists’ subjective sense of change is listed as one purpose for hosting deliberative events (e.g., Scully & McCoy, 2005). Moreover, because deliberative satisfaction is linked to increased efficacy and engagement (Gastil et al., 2010), feeling that participation has improved one’s political attitudes and behaviors may very well lead to actual increases in engagement (Knobloch & Gastil, in press). How panelists describe change, then, is equally important to understanding that change as is pre and post quantitative responses.

In addition, the findings here attest to the need for further study. As previously mentioned, the 2014 CIRs, and the potential for an even greater expansion of the process in 2015 and 2016, provide the opportunity to test these measures with a much larger sample size. Such data collection is already underway. An analysis of this larger sample utilizing many of these same assessments will help more fully determine whether panelists underwent objective change.
References

