

Executive Summary

Piloting the use of Deliberative Polling for Multistakeholder Internet Governance: *Considered Judgments on Access for the Next Billion*

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Multistakeholder Internet governance aspires to build inclusive democratic processes for Internet policy-making that enable meaningful participation from all the relevant stakeholders—governments, the private sector, civil society, the technical and academic communities. The fundamental challenge is how Internet governance processes can reflect democratic values when participants in these processes come from such different entities drawn from countries all over the world? How can such a multistakeholder process embody democratic values? Can multistakeholder processes yield outcomes that have legitimacy?

We report here on a pilot application of a mechanism that offers a promising and practical approach to these questions: Deliberative Polling. Deliberative Polling has been applied around the world, but mostly with samples of the mass public (see <http://cdd.stanford.edu>). We asked what would happen with a population of experts from different stakeholder groups in the Internet governance community drawn from different geographical regions? Can this approach serve as a viable method to facilitate multistakeholder Internet governance?

We piloted Deliberative Polling at the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) in João Pessoa, Brazil in December 2015. The pilot entailed deliberation by a stratified random sample of *netizens*, citizens of the Internet, drawn through random sampling from all the relevant stakeholder groups and regions to engage together in dialogue and register opinions in confidential questionnaires before and after deliberation.

This pilot application focused on the topic of how to increase Internet access for the world's next billion users. An advisory group clarified policy options and vetted briefing materials for balance and accuracy. A stratified random sample of the IGF population was given the initial questionnaire, recruited to deliberations and given a post-deliberation questionnaire. The results are encouraging in terms of representativeness (in demographics and policy attitudes), changes in policy attitudes, knowledge gain, evidence of equal participation and reasoned deliberation, as shown by qualitative data. We believe the pilot demonstrates the possibility that deliberators drawn from all these sectors can participate in substantive dialogue, weighing the merits of issues and coming to specific conclusions. The pilot was limited in its duration and scale, but its results strongly support the conclusion that this approach to multistakeholder Internet governance is viable.

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1. The Challenge of Multistakeholder Governance

Internet governance has long aspired to implement “multistakeholder” processes that are “democratic” and inclusive for all relevant parties. More specifically, the UN sponsored Tunis Agenda (WSIS 2005) prescribed that “A multistakeholder approach should be adopted, as far as possible, at all levels” of Internet governance (paragraph 37). The same document called for the creation of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF), as a “space for dialogue among all stakeholders” on “Internet-related policy issues.” The hope was for a process of dialogue that is “multilateral, multistakeholder, democratic and transparent.”² It should consider issues “that are cross-cutting and multidimensional and that either affect more than one institution, are not dealt with by any institution or are not addressed in a coordinated manner.”³

The multistakeholder approach was reaffirmed in 2014 by the *NetMundial* governance principles: “Internet governance should be built on democratic, multistakeholder processes, ensuring the meaningful and accountable participation of all stakeholders, including governments, the private sector, civil society, the technical community, the academic community and users (emphasis added).”

When the UN extended the IGF for another ten years in 2015, it said “that the management of the Internet as a global facility includes multilateral, transparent, democratic and multistakeholder processes.” It took note of the variety of parties that must be included: “the full involvement of Governments, the private sector, civil society, international organizations, technical and academic communities, and all other relevant stakeholders in accordance with their respective roles and responsibilities” (paragraph 57).

How are all these very different perspectives and actors to be included while also making the process “democratic”? How can multistakeholder processes coexist with multilateral processes that typically involve negotiations among governments?

The IGF provides a good environment to explore these challenges. It was explicitly established as a forum for multistakeholder governance embodying the full range of criteria mentioned above. We explore it here as a venue for testing a mechanism in the effort to innovate multistakeholder processes.

2. Deliberative Democracy as a Method to Improve Multistakeholder Governance

We believe that deliberative democracy mechanisms such as Deliberative Polling⁴ can be adapted to address some Internet Governance questions in a way that mitigates the challenges listed above. The solution is to practice deliberative democracy among netizens through a mechanism of inclusion applying to all the stakeholders. By netizens we mean

² WSIS Tunis Agenda for the Information Society. See <http://www.itu.int/net/wsis/docs2/tunis/off/6rev1.html>. See also discussion in Jeremy Malcolm “Multi-Stakeholder Governance” 2008, pp. 3-4.

³ Ibid.

⁴ See <http://cdd.stanford.edu>

individuals who will act as if they are members of a demos or political entity constituted by users of the Internet. They may also have other memberships, but for the purposes of this exercise we asked them to respond with their sincere views on Internet governance issues as deliberative citizens of the Internet.

Stratified random sampling of the relevant population is employed as the mechanism of inclusion to recruit a representative sample of deliberative netizens. The individuals from various entities can have their views represented equally, on an individual basis as required by political equality, even though there are evident inequalities among nation-states, individuals, corporations, NGO's, etc. Confidential questionnaires are employed to gather what might be their sincere opinions, both before and after deliberation. The application of secret ballots (confidential questionnaires) is transparent, even if any particular individual's secret ballot is not.

A representative sample is not the same as a sample of representatives. If the process works well, the participants will be "representative" of the relevant population, but they will not be "representatives" in the sense of electoral democracy. They are not delegates or ambassadors from their respective institutions. Rather they are intended to be a microcosm of the relevant Internet community (in this case the IGF community) engaged to think about the issues and to respond with their sincere views on the merits. This solution allows for dialogue, transparency and a method of generating conclusions through a democratic process that counts people's views equally. It is not meant to be a method of final decision but one that can point the way to some collective judgments and in that spirit, enhance the dialogue.

There are several empirical challenges to this approach. In this report we describe how we tested them with a pilot conducted in conjunction with the IGF in João Pessoa, Brazil in 2015:

- a) Is it possible to recruit a random and representative sample from the IGF community to participate? The representativeness can be evaluated by comparing participants and non-participants (those who take the initial survey but do not participate in the deliberations) in both attitudes and demographics.
- b) Will there be significant opinion change at the individual level? One potential impediment is that the participants may feel bound to offer the views of the entities that employ them (governments, corporations, NGOs). If this were the case, the deliberative process would not engage them as netizens. Significant opinion change would be an important finding in that it would provide a response to this challenge. And, in particular opinion change of government and private sector participants.
- c) If there are significant opinion changes, can the reasoning supporting those changes be identified? Evidence on this point would buttress the picture of deliberative netizens coming to considered judgments.

- d) Will there be significant knowledge gain? One might argue that the IGF population is already so knowledgeable that we cannot expect it to learn much.
- e) Are the opinion changes distorted by inequalities in certain demographics, such as gender or region (e.g. the divide between the global south and the global north)? For example, if the opinions tended to move systematically in the direction of those held by the men or those held by those from the global north, that might support a picture of domination by the more advantaged undermining claims about the authenticity of the deliberative process.

The full report provides encouraging answers to these questions. It compares the participants in the pilot to a sample of non-participants (those taking the initial survey who did not take part in the dialogue) and shows that the differences between participants and non-participants were modest. It details the statistically significant opinion changes, the knowledge gain and it analyzes the inequalities in the small groups, showing that they did not distort the process. Data show that the process was not dominated by differences between the global north and the global south or by gender differences. Rather it was an equal participatory process in which deliberators responded on the merits of the issues and identified their priorities in confidential questionnaires.

What Happened in the Pilot

We consider this project a pilot for two reasons. First, the treatment (the period of deliberation) was half the minimum period these projects normally last (half a day instead of a full day). Second, the sample size is far smaller than for a normal Deliberative Poll. The pilot had only 61 participants in the deliberations with a comparison group of 241 non-participants who took the same questionnaire. Normally, Deliberative Polls are conducted with three to five times more participants. Despite the truncated treatment and the small sample size, there were numerous statistically significant changes in opinion. This result was surprising given a third difference from most Deliberative Polls—the participants in this deliberation were from an expert population rather than the mass public. Hence, these participants are more informed to begin with and likely to have more settled opinions than the general public. This factor would make it reasonable to expect little opinion change.

The thirteen policy options that were the primary subject of deliberation are listed in Table I. All of the options were rated on the same 0 to 10 scale so their final scores post-deliberation indicate an order of priority. Significant opinion changes are noted by the asterisks. Seven of the thirteen options changed significantly

The top two ideas were the proposals for free public access in government centers such as schools or libraries and at non-government institutions such as local businesses or user communities. The latter increased significantly. There was also very strong support (ranking third) for government actions to nurture market competition, presumably based on the idea that competition would lower prices and hence increase access. The next two proposals, establishing universal service funds and encouraging nations to consider the

Internet as a right, both dropped significantly, but they were still rated high enough post-deliberation to rank fourth and fifth.

Turning to the bottom of the priority list, Zero rating and the alternative of Equal Rating with free advertising ranked 13th and 11th respectively, with the free advertising proposal dropping significantly. Concerns with net neutrality produced an intense debate on Zero rating as shown by the qualitative data in the full report.

Table I: Policy Priorities Ranked Highest to Lowest Post-Deliberation

Proposals Ranked Highest to Lowest by POST Deliberation

| | Pre | Post | Post-Pre |
|--|------|------|-----------|
| Q1) On a 0 to 10 scale, where 0 is lowest possible priority, 10 is highest possible priority, and 5 is exactly in the middle, what priority would you say each of the following should have for increasing access to the Internet? | | | |
| f. Facilitate free public access by local government centers such as schools and libraries | 8.53 | 8.78 | 0.255 |
| g. Facilitate free public access by non-government institutions, such as local businesses or user communities | 7.39 | 8.41 | 1.018*** |
| e. Increase government actions to nurture market competition | 7.48 | 7.84 | 0.357 |
| h. Encourage nations to establish Universal Service Funds to provide Internet access to all citizens | 7.83 | 7.11 | -0.722* |
| k. Governments should be encouraged to make best efforts to ensure access to the Internet as a right | 8.14 | 6.94 | -1.204*** |
| d. Encourage the spread of micro-financed community phones | 6.21 | 6.68 | 0.464 |
| j. Establish a multistakeholder clearinghouse to connect funders with projects for global Internet access | 7.62 | 6.50 | -1.115*** |
| m. Place limits of Intellectual Property costs for smartphones and other access-enabling technology | 5.40 | 6.23 | 0.830* |
| l. Promote a global intermediary liability regime to limit the liability of ISPs and platform providers for actions of their users | 6.71 | 6.16 | -0.556 |
| i. Encourage coordinated international action through the Digital Solidarity Fund | 6.85 | 5.48 | -1.370*** |
| c. Encourage advertising funded (free Equal Rating) access for Internet services | 5.26 | 4.32 | -0.943** |
| a. Leave it to the market to increase access | 3.88 | 3.92 | 0.033 |
| b. Encourage Zero rating for particular services and content | 3.87 | 3.4 | -0.472 |

Note: The survey results presented are means from pre-deliberation and post-deliberation, with the difference between the post and pre deliberation mean and statistical significance. Significance below 0.01 is indicated with “***”, below .05 with “**” and below .10 with “*”.