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Does deliberation help deliver informed electorates: Evidence from Irish referendum votes

Abstract

We argue that integrating citizen deliberation structures into the pre-referendum phase can deliver systematic improvements in democratic outcomes such as alignment between values and vote, ie: correct voting. Using data from three Irish referendums, the research examines the potential of deliberative mini-publics to deliver more informed electorates. An emerging branch of literature argues that direct and deliberative democracy can be mutually supportive. It demonstrates that there is much potential to be realised when the fields of deliberation and the practice of referendums are brought together (Saward, 2001, p 363).

Greater understanding of referendum issues can be achieved by mini-publics extending the time allocated to discussing issues, producing rigorous and informed materials which can be used during the subsequent referendum debates and delivering decisions which stem from a citizen institution and from citizens that are more likely to approximate the general public and therefore be more trusted by ordinary voters. Ultimately we argue that deliberative processes enhance subjective and objective knowledge and this leads to referendum outcomes where a larger share of voters cast ballots which align with their own fundamental values. The analysis demonstrates that there was greater alignment between the core values of voters and their vote decisions when a deliberative phase was introduced into the constitutional referendum process; and furthermore that this alignment grew as deliberation became more embedded and normalized.

Keywords: Referendums; citizen deliberation; mini-publics; abortion; marriage equality

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Introduction

Democracies around the world have turned increasingly to referendums. They hold many attractions, offering the promise of citizen participation in politics, deliberation, and informed and direct decision making. But as we know many referendums fall substantially short of these laudable goals with weak campaign efforts, limited voter knowledge and low turnout leading to less than ideal referendum outcomes (LeDuc, 2015). Most problematically, there is evidence that referendums can deliver decisions which run contrary to the expressed preferences of the voters at that referendum (Suiter and Reidy, 2013). Due to these potential sub-optimal characteristics of direct democracy it is a field that has been largely ignored by often normatively focussed deliberative democratic theorists (Elstub et al., 2016 p 141; Owen and Smith, 2015: 213; el-Wakil 2017). Many tend to follow Cohen in his argument that direct democracy's aggregative aspects prevent it from being a particularly good arrangement for deliberation (Cohen 1989:30). Yet referendums are a fact of life in many states, and if current trends continue, are set to become more prevalent. There is an emerging branch of literature which argues that direct and deliberative democracy can be mutually supportive (Saward 2001, p 363; el-Wakil, 2017). This work demonstrates that there is great potential to be realised when the fields of deliberation and the practice of referendums are brought together. We pursue this objective and argue that integrating citizen deliberation structures into the pre-referendum phase may deliver systematic improvements in democratic outcomes.

Using data from three mandatory constitutional referendums in the Republic of Ireland (hereafter Ireland), this research examines the potential of deliberative mini-publics to deliver more informed electorates, greater understanding of the issues involved in each referendum and ultimately enhanced referendum outcomes where a larger share of voters cast ballots

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which align with their fundamental values, ie vote correctly. The analysis demonstrates that there was greater alignment between the core values held by voters and their vote decision when a deliberative phase was introduced into the referendum process; and furthermore that this alignment grew as deliberation became more systemized and normalized.

The three referendums (on children's rights, marriage rights and abortion rights) draw from the liberal conservative cleavage in Irish politics. Referendums in this area have tended to be polarizing, intensely contested and often divisive (Elkink et al., 2017; Sinnott, 1995). While each referendum had a set of specific issues, fundamentally, all three questions required voters to make decisions on the ways in which society should be organized and on the balancing of individual rights. These are all questions which should map to an individual's own values. Consequently, a most similar case design is used as the referendums posed questions on moral and social issues. Each referendum took place in a similar partisan landscape: in all three referendums the major governing party was the centre right Fine Gael party. Each referendum to some extent follows Goodin's (2005) conception of a system where different styles of deliberation occur in sequence. The first of these referendums on children's rights involved an elite consultation process in parliament before the question proceeded to referendum. The marriage referendum was influenced by decisions at a deliberative mini-public established by the Irish government for the first time to consider same sex marriage and other issues (Suiter et al., 2016a; Suiter et al., 2016b). Prior to the abortion referendum the government convened a second mini-public which then formed the basis of an extensive deliberative committee phase in parliament (Field, 2018).

A summary of the stages for each referendum is provided in Figure 1[1].

[1] The mini-public which sat in 2012-2014 and dealt with marriage equality was called the Constitutional Convention. The mini-public which say in 2018 dealt with abortion and was called the Citizens' Assembly.

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INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

In each referendum, the leadership of the major political parties were in favour of the proposed change, although individual party members were given a free vote in both marriage and abortion. In a vote analysis, partisan cues were found to be minimal (Elkink et al., 2017, 2019) abating Ingham and Levin's (2017) concerns that the influence of mini-publics could be limited to independents. Indeed historically, partisan cues have had limited influence on preferences at social and moral referendums in Ireland (Sinnott, 1995).

This co-development (Curato and Böker, 2017) of mini-publics and the referendum process in Ireland offers the possibility of promoting participation in the wider public sphere, potentially answering the criticism of Carole Pateman (2012: 8) that there has been little interest in the wider public sphere and broadening the scope of deliberation in mass democracy (Chambers, 2009:331). We explore how a deliberation phase can shape referendum votes and assess what are the underlying dynamics at play? The overall argument is that as deliberation becomes more systemic, correct voting increases and the alignment between voter preferences and their vote choice grows.

This paper proceeds as follows: The core argument and hypotheses of the paper are developed in section two and section three provides a brief overview of the referendum process in Ireland and some details on each of the three referendum votes. The data and method deployed are described in section four. Section five begins with the presentation of descriptive data on each of the variables before proceeding to the multivariate analysis. Some concluding remarks and suggestions for further research are included in section six.

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Can referendums be more deliberative?

The use of referendums as a decision-making device is widely supported by citizens. Across the ideological spectrum, political parties favour enhanced roles for citizens in the democratic process and in part, it is this confluence of preferences between citizens and parties that has contributed to their greater use (Reidy and Suiter, 2015). On the one hand; there is evidence to show that they can be subject to second order effects (Reif et al. 1997) and there are concerns about citizen competence (Dahl, 1992; Saward, 2001 p 369). On the other hand; they also offer highly motivated politically active citizens the possibility to shape decisions (Lupia and Matsusaka, 2004); and can work as a tool to engage citizens who may be disaffected by party politics and the political system (Schuck and de Vreese, 2015).

In an ideal referendum, voting preferences would be determined by the values held by voters and their knowledge of the issue being decided (Svensson, 2002). Sometimes termed a first order referendum process in the direct democracy literature, this occurs when voter decision making is structured along value and belief lines (Glencross and Trechsel, 2011; Garry, Marsh and Sinnott, 2005). Lau and Redlawsk (1997) term this process at elections correct voting: voters who cast a ballot for the candidate closest to them in values and policy preferences, vote correctly. Indeed Hobolt (2007) has argued that referendums are meaningful when voters are making preferences that reflect their core values and beliefs and by implication a damaging disconnect can emerge when voters are not casting ballots in line with their values.

Voters hold fundamental beliefs and values in a wide range of areas such as citizenship, sovereignty, democracy, human rights, equality, autonomy and accountability and we also know that these types of values change slowly over many years (Ingelhart, 2003). But as

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Zaller (1992) noted the impact of 'people's value predispositions always depends on whether citizens possess the contextual information to translate their values in support of a particular vote. Political knowledge, interest and partisanship are all associated with higher levels of correct voting (Lau et al., 2008) and more recently political polarization has also been shown to increase correct voting (Pierce and Lau, 2019). However Bowler and Donovan (2002,p 9) argue that 'reasoning citizens' relying on heuristics and shortcuts can properly manage the demands of the process and vote in a manner that is consistent with their preferences and values. In a study of Swiss referendum votes Nai (2015) established that political sophistication and the use of heuristics are important contributors to correct voting in direct democracy (see also Milic, 2012; 2015).

Broder (2000) observed that voters were often under-informed and made up their minds in a media environment that highlighted the sensational or particularly for lower profile measures provided little or no information. In the same vein Gastil and Richards (2013: 253) point out that too often referendum processes furnish citizens with 'insufficient information about policy problems, inadequate choices among policy solutions, flawed criteria for choosing among such solutions, and few opportunities for reflection on those choices prior to decision making'. In light of these findings, it is not surprising that there are mixed views on the merits of referendums and some have come to the conclusion that referendums do not meet deliberative goals (LeDuc 2015; Gastil et al., 2007; Gerber et al., 2001).

However, the more recent 'systemic' turn in deliberative democracy (Parkinson and Mansbridge, 2012) has introduced perspectives with which to address both the questions posed by deliberative theorists about direct democracy and to provide a method with which to facilitate the systemic turn. This systemic turn is part of an approach which recognises deliberation may not occur in isolation but rather as part of a system and in different spaces.

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Gastil and Richards (2013) suggest one solution to systematising deliberation is to make direct democracy more deliberative by joining randomly selected citizen assemblies (mini-publics) onto existing institutions and practices. We argue that mini-publics may thus form part of an enhanced informing and mobilising process via a 'discursive role' (Curato and Boker, 2016) where the focus is on arguments that have been deliberatively scrutinised (Niemeyer and Jennstål, 2018, p 330). Of course mass deliberation is hard but we argue that it is possible that if mini-publics are embedded in the system a 'virtuous process' may form where additional deliberatively scrutinised information may come into the public domain and have a potential role as trusted information proxies that might enable citizens to make better judgements (Warren and Gastil, 2015; Ingham and Levin, 2018) and hence a greater opportunity for values and vote choice to align.

Scarce time and cognitive resources means citizens can, and often do, rely on the cognitive shortcut of trusting others. However, a decision to trust another requires knowing something about them and believing that there is reason to think that their interests and/or values may be aligned. Institutions often make these decisions both easier and better and enable citizens to make good trust judgements because they 'incentivize and certify both competence and interest convergence' (Warren and Gastil, 2015: 564). Further, learning the conclusions of a deliberative mini-public can influence respondents' policy opinions, bringing them closer into conformity with the opinions of the participants in the deliberative mini-public (Ingham and Levin, 2018) Such institutions would be high in competence, and be believed to be impartial. Mini-publics can meet these criteria (Warren and Pearse 2008) and can influence the opinions of relatively uninformed citizens (Ingham and Levin, 2018). These mini-publics, hear from experts, deliberate and provide policy advice. Usually organised by an independent secretariat, they carry out their work in a transparent manner and are often widely covered in

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the media. In some cases, they are also directly tied to the legislature (Suiter, 2018). In this way mini-publics should deepen the deliberative dimension of referendums (Goodin and Dryzek 2006; Smith 2009; Warren and Pearse 2008) and facilitate the cognitively demanding act of voting and become trusted information proxies (Warren and Gastil, 2015). They can also increase political efficacy generating a sense of legitimacy in the political system (Boulianne, 2017).

In the case of the 2018 abortion referendum in Ireland, the mini-public was mentioned 640 times at the parliamentary committee and some 642 times in the print media during the course of its progress, according to a search of Lexus Nexus and of the parliamentary debates website. At the same time, the committee on abortion was mentioned some 1178 times providing ample opportunity for dissemination. An exit poll taken on the day of the referendum found that 66% of voters were aware of the mini-public (Citizens' Assembly of Ireland) and around 70% could answer specific knowledge questions as to its operation, pointing to widespread knowledge about the process.

We might also expect that citizens' trust in these institutions should grow as citizens become more used to them. In a report on the 2012 Citizen Initiative Review (CIR) in Oregon where deliberating citizens produce a pre-referendum argument summary guide for other citizens (Gastil et al., 2016b; Knobloch et al', 2019; Már and Gastil, 2019), it was found that the modal response for voters was that they placed 'a little'" trust in each section of the CIR, while Warren and Gastil (2015) found that the CIR was functioning as a facilitative trustee for many citizens.

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We argue that integrating a citizen deliberation phase such as a mini-public into the referendum process should enhance outcomes. Referendum outcomes are often evaluated by the Yes and No votes recorded at the voter level but understanding the vote is not our core objective here. We follow the correct voting literature and focus on the alignment between the core values held by a voter and their vote decision. We expect that first order decision making (or vote/value alignment) increases when voters have a trusted institution such as a minipublic make a prior recommendation. From a normative perspective, greater alignment is considered to be a good thing. Deliberative innovations are a relatively new phenomenon in politics and as a result we expect their impact to develop over time. This leads to our first hypothesis: H1: The proportion of voters whose vote choice and value position align will increase as the deliberation phase become more embedded in the referendum process (i.e. increase from children's referendum to the marriage referendum to the abortion referendum).

The next step is to uncover how integrating a citizen deliberation process into a referendum affects outcomes. We know that knowledge and understanding matter a great deal in voter decision making (Elkink and Sinnott, 2015; Hobolt, 2007; 2005; Lau and Redlawsk, 1997; Lupia 1994). If the issue being decided by referendum draws from citizens' fundamental values and beliefs, it may be a well-trodden policy road involving extensive public debate and voters may have built up a great deal of objective and subjective knowledge on the issue over time. Polarization on an issue can contribute to intense debate and as Pierce and Lau (2019) have shown, increase correct voting. It must also be acknowledged that in some cases, referendum questions may tap into cross-cutting value cleavages and in these complex scenarios, competing variables will shape the outcome with the most salient cleavage likely to dominate (LeDuc, 2002). Notably, Gastil et al (2016a) argue that deliberation can also separate values from vote choice. For example in relation to one of the cases in this research,

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greater understanding of the details of abortion provision might dislodge an alignment between values and vote. If a voter held absolutist 'pro-life' beliefs that an abortion was never medically necessary, a referendum campaign which debunked this position could lead some voters to re-evaluate their vote decision and support abortion provision while retaining their fundamental values in opposition to abortion on demand. Lupia and McCubbins (1998) have argued that increasing knowledge levels enables voters to establish the consequences of their vote choice (1998). Knowledge can also be acquired in the lead up to a vote or during the campaign and a number of studies have shown that campaigns which shape knowledge can alter the final vote (Elkink and Sinnott, 2015; Hobolt, 2005).

Including a citizen deliberation stage in the overall referendum process extends the period during which the issue is the subject of debate and discussion. Expert contributions and the views of campaign groups are shared at an earlier point and it also creates a cohort of citizen representatives who can make public contributions on either side of the discussion. We thus expect knowledge levels on the specific issue to increase in a more deliberative environment. As voters become more familiar with deliberative processes, we also expect that they will engage more with the issues involved. They will acquire greater objective knowledge of the deliberative institution and environment. Separately, it is also likely that voters' subjective knowledge of the referendum issue, or self-reported understanding, will increase. Consequently, we expect that voters should feel more informed about the referendum issue when a mini-public is part of the referendum process and informed voters should have greater alignment between their values and vote decision and have a higher propensity to vote correctly. We examine subjective knowledge (understanding) with our second hypothesis:

H2: Greater voter subjective understanding of the referendum issue will lead to greater values/vote alignment.

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Greater voter objective knowledge should translate into more coherent voter decision making (Hobolt, 2007; Milic, 2012). As outlined above, integrating a deliberative phase into the referendum process should increase objective knowledge of the question being decided by increasing the quantity and quality of information available to voters and by extending the time period available for reflection. This should allow voters to crystallize their values into a vote choice which is consistent with their fundamental views. In other words, the more objective information a voter has, the more likely they are to vote in line with their values. This leads us to hypothesis three:

H3: Increased voter objective knowledge of the issue will lead to greater alignment between voter values and vote choice.

Referendums are sometimes criticized for asking voters to make decisions about technical issues about which they may have little information or interest but there is a large body of work which demonstrates that voters use cues and heuristics to shortcut the decision making process and that frequently this leads to decisions that align with the core views of the voters (see Nai, 2015; Bowler and Donovan, 1998; Lupia, 1994; Suiter and Reidy, 2013). When a deliberative process is fused with a referendum we would expect knowledge effects to be complex. Knowledge of the deliberation process may also act as a proxy or a shortcut for knowledge of the referendum issue. We are interested in establishing whether knowledge of the deliberative process in general leads to better referendum outcomes in the form of greater alignment between values and vote. In addition we should see a greater proportion of voters who knew about the mini public in each case. We evaluate this relationship in hypothesis four:

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H4: Voters who have objective knowledge of the deliberative process will exhibit greater alignment between their values and vote choice.

Referendum votes in Ireland

Ireland is one of the countries that makes frequent use of the referendum device. The Irish constitution (Bunreacht na hÉireann) was adopted by plebiscite in 1937. A relatively conservative document, it included a range of provisions on the organisation of society that were heavily influenced by Catholic social thinking and the social mores of the time. The constitution included a hetero-normative definition of marriage and allocated considerable rights to parents in relation to the welfare of their children. It also included a prohibition on divorce and was later amended to include a prohibition on abortion. As social and political values evolved, pressure increased to bring public policy in line with citizens' preferences (Reidy, 2018). However, liberalising public policy in many areas necessitated constitutional referendums.

Following Altman (2011) Ireland has binding, constitutional referendums which are top down tools. The right of referendum initiative lies with the government. The constitution also provides for ordinary referendums but none have taken place. Ireland has held forty two referendums and it has a reasonably regulated referendum environment: it sits at the midpoint of campaign regulation index (Reidy and Suiter, 2015). The overall campaign regulations relating to communications, finance and the role of agencies remained stable over the course of the three referendums discussed here. A Referendum Commission is responsible for providing information on the referendum question and also for promoting voting participation. Typically, commissions are established about two months before a referendum and they send an information notice to each household, use traditional and social media to

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share information and promote voting and the chair of the commission (a member of the judiciary) engages in media interviews. Political advertising by campaign groups and political parties in broadcast media is prohibited, although there is a legal lacunae in relation to advertising on digital media. There are few campaign funding requirements and no public funding for campaign groups is provided. The government is prohibited from spending public money to support one side in a referendum, foreign donations are banned and there are some minimal transparency requirements.

The key difference among the three referendums considered in this research lies in the pathway to the ballot. The children's rights referendum involved an extensive elite consultation process and the final proposal achieved considerable consensus among key actors in the area (O'Mahony, 2016). It was not until 2012 that Irish governments began to integrate formal citizen deliberation processes (mini-publics) into the procedures for constitutional change when the first national mini-public the Constitutional Convention of Ireland was established. It was comprised of 66 randomly selected citizens and 33 politicians from the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. The Convention deliberated on ten topics including marriage rights on which it recommended that a referendum be held. The Convention was widely judged to have been a success and in 2016, a second mini-public was established, the Citizens' Assembly of Ireland, which was also allocated a number of constitutional proposals to consider, including the provision of abortion. The Assembly was made up of 99 randomly selected citizens and a chairperson. It too voted largely in favour of holding a referendum that would deliver general liberalisation of abortion provision.

Two of the three referendums considered in this research involved a mini-public deliberative phase prior to the referendum campaign. In the marriage referendum, the mini-public

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recommended a referendum and this was then delivered by the government. In the abortion referendum, there were a number of stages to the process. First, a mini-public was established which made extensive recommendations in a report. Its report was then considered and evaluated by a committee of both houses of parliament which made further recommendations on the issue. Informed by the citizen deliberation and parliamentary deliberation phases the government decided to hold a referendum. Essentially, the focus of this paper is on consequences for the vote-value nexus of the different pre-referendum processes.

Children's Rights, Marriage Equality and Abortion

The referendum on children's rights took place in November 2012 and the proposal was approved by 58% of voters on a turnout of 34%. Liberal-secular groups favoured greater recognition of the children's rights while conservative-religious groups opposed any change on the grounds that it would lead to a diminution of the role and status of the family based on heterosexual marriage (O'Mahony, 2016). Liberal values had been in the ascendancy from the 1990s and all of the main political parties supported the proposal. Although the amendment passed, it was by a moderate margin and voter turnout was far lower than had been expected and hoped for, given the heightened sensitivity to child protection in a country that was continuing to deal with revelations of massive historical clerical and state abuse of children. Voter knowledge of the proposal was deemed to have been low and unusually voting took place on a Saturday. Combined, these were seen to have contributed to the poor turnout and moderate winning margin (McGing, 2014; O'Mahony, 2016).

The marriage equality vote was held in May 2015: this debate also broke down along the longstanding liberal conservative divide. The proposal was supported by all the main political parties and had wide support from civil society. The No campaign was led by Catholic lay

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organisations and a small number of public representatives were involved. The campaign was quite active and the proposal passed on a wide margin with a Yes vote of 62% on a turnout of 61%.

The abortion vote took place in 2018 and was the sixth referendum question put before the people on the issue since 1983. This gives some sense of the intractability of abortion in politics in Ireland. The campaign was quite active and a large number of civil society groups advocated for a Yes vote, they were supported by a significant majority of parliamentarians. The No side was more active than at the children and marriage votes but the post referendum analysis concluded that its campaign did not connect with voters. The referendum passed with a Yes vote of 66% on a turnout of 64%.

Data and methods

There is no national referendum study in Ireland and voter research is quite restricted as a consequence. The data used in this research are drawn from three separate studies carried out at referendums on the liberal conservative cleavage. All surveys used representative sampling of Irish voters. Data from the children's rights referendum was a post-referendum survey commissioned by the Referendum Commission; data for the marriage referendum was collected in conjunction with the *Sunday Business Post* newspaper and taken during and after the campaign; and data from the abortion referendum were drawn from an exit poll conducted by the state broadcaster on the day of the referendum. There have been other recent referendums drawing from this cleavage, including blasphemy but no data is available for these votes. The three studies used in this analysis had different objectives and design specifications. The data are imperfect and this does limit the analysis at some points. Details

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on the data collection and on each of the variables for each referendum are included in Appendix A.

We approach hypotheses one to four using a series of cross-sectional models. We generate a dependent variable which correlates values with vote. This is a categorical variable made up of five discreet groups consisting of Aligned Yes, Aligned No, Unaligned Yes and Unaligned No, and mid-point voters[2]. For example, in the abortion and marriage surveys the variable is derived from the combination of vote choice and a values question which was 'Abortion should be freely available – there should be a total ban on abortion' (11 point scale from 0-10). The abortion question is a very reliable estimator for values on the liberal conservative cleavage in Irish politics (Marsh, Farrell and Reidy, 2018) and is used for the marriage referendum analysis due to the absence of a marriage values question.

In the children's rights referendum we used the question: 'How did you vote in the referendum on Children?....Why did you vote no?' Thus the values variable can only be derived from the question asked of No voters, due to limitations in the study design. Respondents were only asked 'Why did you vote No?' and not 'Why did you Vote Yes'. We deploy a multinomial logistic regression as our dependent variable is categorical and not ordinal. The base category is Aligned Yes voters, the category with the largest number of respondents. We also utilise a relative risk ratio, commonly interpreted as an odds ratios. It demonstrates the constant effect of a predictor X, on the likelihood that one outcome will occur.

[2] Mid-point voters are those who are 5 on an 11-point scale, its not possible to classify these voters as aligned or unaligned and so they are not included in the discussion.

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Results: Deliberation and Referendum Voting

We first look at the proportion of those who are Aligned Yes or No voters in each of the three referendums; this is our dependent variable in all subsequent models. In the children's rights referendum, we find that 51% were Aligned No voters, those who reported voting No because they did not agree with, or were opposed to the amendment. The remaining No voters included 21% who did not understand the amendment and 27% who gave a variety of second order reasons. In the marriage equality survey, we find that 55% of No voters cast ballots that were aligned with their values, this is a small increase from the 51% of Aligned No voters in the children's rights referendum. However, the number of Aligned Yes voters was significantly higher at 80% in the marriage referendum.

A similar question was asked in the abortion survey. Overall, we found 80% of Yes voters were Aligned Yes, while 76% of No voters were Aligned. This is a 20 - point jump from the proportion of Aligned No voters in the marriage equality referendum. These figures provide support for the argument posited in hypothesis one that the integration of a deliberative phase into the referendum process potentially enhanced the quality of voter decision making by increasing the alignment of voter values with their vote choice. It could be that each referendum was simply more salient than the last or indeed that voter knowledge in these moral issues was cumulative but we argue that an increase in values aligning with vote from around half of all voters to around 80% may be suggestive of a systemic impact of the deliberative procedures adopted in advance of the referendums on marriage rights and abortion.

Turning next to understanding (subjective knowledge) of the referendum issue, we use a five point Likert scale with categories 'did not understand' to 'understood very well'. The

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dependent variable is binary in this analysis with just No voters (due to data limitations). Examining Table 1 we can see that subjective understanding matters for voting at the children's rights referendum, at least for No voters and essentially as subjective understanding increases, the odds of each voter casting a ballot which aligns with their values increases notably. Specifically, every point increase in understanding increases the chances of having an aligned vote-values position by 2.16.

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

The marriage referendum data does not have a subjective knowledge, or understanding, question, so we turn next to the abortion referendum (results presented in Table 1). As noted, the abortion survey was an exit poll carried out in three sub-samples. The variables of interest for hypothesis two are included in wave three where the subjective knowledge question (understanding) is based on a 10 point scale asking the question 'how well do you feel you understood the issues'. Values and vote were included in each wave. Aligned Yes voters are significantly more likely to have higher levels of subjective understanding. Overall, for each one point drop in understanding, the odds of not being an aligned Yes voter increases, with for example each one point drop in understanding increasing the odds by 0.76 that a voter is Aligned No[3]. It appears that Aligned No Voters have lower levels of subjective understanding with values driving their vote choice. Thus hypothesis two can be partially accepted for Aligned Yes voters.

Turning next to hypothesis three and objective knowledge of the substantive issue, we consider data from the marriage and abortion referendums. There was no objective

[3] The corresponding figures for unaligned yes and no being 0.74 and 0.76 respectively.

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knowledge question asked in the children's rights study. For the marriage referendum, we have a series of four objective knowledge questions on the substantive issue and on average some 70% of respondents answered correctly. In the abortion referendum we had two questions and 73% of respondents gave the correct answer. Counting the number of correct answers for each respondent, and treating 'don't know' as an incorrect answer, we obtain a five point scale of (objective) knowledge of the referendum issue in marriage and a three point scale for abortion. Looking at Table 1, we see that higher objective knowledge leads to an increase in the correlation of values and vote at the marriage referendum for Yes voters. As voter knowledge decreases, the odds of being in the Aligned No voter category increases by 0.4[4]. Thus higher levels of objective knowledge leads to greater alignment between voter values and vote choice for Yes voters: Correct voting increases with greater objective knowledge for Yes voters. In terms of demographics, age is significant for most categories. In other words being in an older age category raises the odds of vote and value being misaligned.

For the abortion referendum, the objective knowledge data is included in wave three of the exit poll. The objective knowledge variable is based on two questions: 'If a majority of voters vote 'yes' in this referendum, the Oireachtas will still be able to implement strict restrictions on abortions in Ireland' (59% correct); The current government is a coalition between Fine Gael and the Labour Party (57% correct). Looking at objective knowledge in Table 1, the general pattern is similar to that identified in the previous analysis for subjective understanding at the abortion referendum. The odds of being in a category other than Aligned Yes significantly increase for each point drop in objective knowledge. The impact of getting

[4] The corresponding figures for the Unaligned Yes category being 0.7 and Unaligned No 0.13

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one question incorrect increases the odds of being Unaligned or Aligned No by 0.7[5]. Thus, the impact of the objective knowledge variables is similar in both referendums with Aligned Yes voters having higher levels of objective knowledge than other categories of voters including Aligned No voters. This delivers partial support for our argument and backing for the proposition outlined in hypothesis three but only for Aligned Yes voters.

Turning to hypothesis four and the argument that greater objective knowledge among voters of the deliberative phase in the referendum process, leads to greater alignment between their values and vote choice. We have data for the mini-publics at the marriage and abortion referendums. There was no deliberation phase at the children's rights referendum. For the marriage referendum, taking 'don't know' as a lack of knowledge, this leads to a 5-point scale from zero to four indicating the level of awareness of the Constitutional Convention. In our sample, 54% score up to two correct answers, a further 34% had three items correct, and the remaining 12% were fully aware of the Convention. Questions on objective knowledge of the deliberative phase at the abortion referendum were included in wave one of the exit poll, where 66 % were aware of the mini-public. Again we used these to construct a deliberation index. In all cases the less knowledge any voters had of the deliberative process, the odds increase that they are in a category other than Aligned Yes (the z value is negative in all cases). Thus returning to Table 1, we can see that while knowledge of the deliberative process matters it is not significant in the marriage referendum. But in the abortion referendum there is a significant effect with those less knowledgeable about deliberation being more likely to be Aligned No voters (0.6). However, Unaligned Yes Voters (0.7) are more likely to have greater knowledge of deliberation. This suggests that conservative voters

[5] In terms of demographics, being male increases the odds of being either an Unaligned No voter (0.4) or an Aligned one (0.6). Increasing in age by one category, generally 10 years, also increases the odds of not being in the Aligned Yes camp, with significant results amongst all voter categories.

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were more likely to vote Yes in opposition to their values if they were aware of the mini-public deliberations, an important finding of the research.

INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

Thus it appears that objective knowledge of the deliberative process may well matter. Unfortunately in the abortion data, the variables forming the deliberation index were part of a separate wave of questions from the understanding and objective knowledge questions and thus the models are not exactly comparable. Nonetheless, we argue they give a good overall indication of direction of travel and we can see that awareness of a specific deliberative mini-public increases correct voting in both the marriage and the abortion referendums thereby allowing us to tentatively accept hypothesis four.

As the analysis of the four hypotheses is spread across three datasets, we provide a summary of the results in Table 2.

Conclusion: Deliberation meets decision

The analysis has demonstrated that knowledge and understanding of a referendum issue matters in shaping referendum outcomes. Critically, it has shown that these factors provide the vital underpinning infrastructure for correct voting at referendums. As voter objective knowledge and understanding of the substantive issue increases, so does the propensity for voters to cast a ballot which is consistent with their fundamental values. Therefore, in line with Nai (2015) and Milic (2012: 2015) we conclude that correct voting is significant at referendums.

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Furthermore, this paper has sought to bridge some specific research strands of deliberative democracy and direct democracy. The analysis has shown that integrating a deliberative democratic structure into a mandatory referendum process can enhance referendum outcomes in the form of delivering correct voting. It has also shown that this effect may increase as the approach becomes more embedded and voters acquire greater knowledge of the deliberative phase. Our core finding is that there are high levels of correct voting at referendums on moral and social issues. And the Constitutional Convention at the marriage referendum and the Citizens' Assembly at the abortion referendum also mattered by enhancing the quality of vote choice. Contributing to the literature on deliberative values and vote alignment (see for example Gastil et al 2016a; Gastil et al., 2018) we can see that they delivered greater levels of knowledge and understanding of the key issues being decided and more voters were able to cast ballots which were fundamentally in line with their core values. However, we also found that some voters, particularly No voters, cast ballots out of sync with their values, likely when they focussed on the complexity involved in policy choice. From a normative standpoint, the results are encouraging.

The analysis conducted in the models was significantly compromised by data availability. This limitation must be acknowledged. It was not possible to conduct a complete analysis for each of the hypotheses because some variables were not present across the three referendums and in some cases where variables were present, they were in different waves of the surveys. This means that more robust analysis is needed and the findings presented here carry a cautionary note.

We have only measured the extent to which awareness of these mini-publics bleeds over into the wider public sphere leading to greater levels of knowledge and understanding among the

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general citizenry not only about the deliberative process itself but also the substantive issue. However, this needs to be the subject of future research and will require dynamic panel models to track the formation of opinion over the full period of the referendum process. Our contribution stems from bridging the research strands of a form of deliberative democracy and a form of direct democracy and the initial results suggest that this is a fruitful endeavour. Further research, examining the deliberative phases and interactions not only of the assemblies, but of the parliament and of the media will shed further light on this question.

Finally, a comment on the Irish experience of referendums. The results of recent votes suggest that direct democracy does not always have to be divisive or deliver a tyranny of the majority which restricts rights. The cases presented here demonstrate that referendums can be structured to provide adequate information for voters, to allow time for deliberation and reflection and can deliver outcomes which are expansive, liberal and progressive.

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Figure 1: Pathway to the referendum vote

Children's Rights	Elite consultation ⇨ **Referendum**
Marriage Equality	Elite consultation ⇨ Citizens' Assembly ⇨ **Referendum**
Abortion Rights	Elite consultation ⇨ Citizens' Assembly ⇨ Parliamentary Review ⇨ **Referendum**

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	Table 1: Probability of an Aligned Vote Across All Voters in Three Referendums					
		Understanding (H2)	**Knowledge Issue (H3)**	**Knowledge Deliberation (H4)**	**Sex (female)**	**Age**
Children's Referendum (N= 2014)	Unaligned No voters	**2.16 (0.22)**			1.12 (0.26)	1.11 (.063)
Marriage Referendum (Wave 3 N= 892)	Unaligned No		**-0.133 (.29)**	1.38 (3.19)	1.63 (0.6)	1.01 (.09)
	Unaligned Yes		**-0.74 (.09)**	1.05 (1.65)	**-0.44 (.05)**	**-0.64 (.07)**
	Aligned No		**-0.44 (.05)**	-0.95 (.1)	-0.77 (.17)	**1.36 (.07)**
	Mid Point		**-0.64 (.07)**	-0.89 (.09)	-0.81 (.17)	**1.36 (.07)**
Abortion Referendum (N= 3779)	Unaligned No	**-0.668 (.05)**	**-0.71 (0.13)**	-0.84 (0.16)	**0.39 (0.13)**	**1.31 (.09)**
	Unaligned Yes	-0.74 (0.54)	1.04 (.15)	**0.70 (.11)**	-0.96 (.27)	**1.16 (.08)**
	Aligned No	**-0.76 (.03)**	**-0.66 (.05)**	**-0.63 (.06)**	**-0.66 (.10)**	**1.55 (.07)**
	Mid Point	**-0.75 (.04)**	-0.99 (.99)	-0.86 (.09)	-0.72 (.13)	**1.25 (.06)**
	Children's Log Likelihood: -230.995 Prob Chi Square: 0.000 N: 236 Marriage: Log Likelihood 1185.37 Prob Chi-Square 0.000 N 892 Abortion: Log Likelihood 341.54 Prob Chi-Square 0.000 N 1234 The Knowledge Deliberation Variable in the Abortion Referendum was asked in a separate wave of t survey. The significance of the control variables did not change and are not reported for this wave Multinomial Logistic Regression. Fully Aligned is the base outcome. The exponentiated coefficient RRR in Stata is reported. *** is significant at .001; ** at 0.01 and * at .05					

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Table 2: Values and Vote Alignment: Children's rights, marriage rights, abortion				
Hypothesis	**Summary Results**	**Children's Rights**	**Marriage Equality**	**Abortion Liberalisation**
1. The proportion of voters whose vote choice and value position align increase as the deliberation phase become more embedded in the referendum process (i.e. increase from children's > marriage > abortion)	Accepted	51% aligned (No voters only)	63% Aligned Yes and No	87% Aligned Yes and No
2. Greater voter subjective understanding of the referendum issue leads to greater values/vote alignment?	Accepted For Aligned Yes voters	Significant lower levels of subjective understanding among Aligned No voters	N/A due to data limitations	Significant higher levels of subjective understanding among Aligned Yes Voters, Aligned No voters have lower levels of subjective understanding
3. Increased voter objective knowledge of the issue leads to greater alignment between voter values and vote choice	Accepted For Aligned Yes voters	N/A	Significant higher levels of objective knowledge among Aligned Yes Voters	Significant higher levels of objective knowledge among Aligned Yes Voters
4. Voters who have objective knowledge of the deliberative process exhibit greater alignment between their values and vote choice?	Accepted For Aligned Yes voters	N/A	N/A	Significant higher levels of objective knowledge of deliberative process among Aligned Yes Voters

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Appendix A

Referendum	Variable	Question wording	Data
Children's Rights	Vote and value alignment (Voted Yes in favour; Voted No against)	How did you vote in the referendum on Children? Why did you vote no? (Did not agree with/opposed to the amendment Did not understand the amendment Other (specify))	Commissioner by Referendum Commissio Conducted by Behaviour and Attitudes One wave Sample Size: 2014
	Campaign deliberation 1. (far too much – far too little) 3. (a lot more – a lot less)	1) Overall, did you feel you had too much time, enough time or too little time to consider the Referendum proposal, prior to the Referendum on November 10th? 2) Now I would like you to think about the level of debate generally around the Children's Referendum. Did you think there was more debate, less debate or about the same amount of debate as usual for a referendum. 3) Now I would like you to think about the level of general discussion between you and your family and friends around the Children's Referendum. Did you think there was more general discussion, less general discussion or about the same amount of discussion as usual for a referendum?	Commissioned by three universities (UCD, DCU, UCC) in collaboration with Conducted by Red C Three waves: 2 pre referendum; 1 post Sample size 892 (wave 3)
	Understanding	By the time this year's Children's Referendum was held on 10th November last, how well do you feel you understood what the Children's Referendum was about, on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 is you feel you understood it Very Well and 5 is you Did Not Understand it At All?	
Marriage Rights	Vote and value alignment	Vote: The two choices you just decided between are listed on this ballot paper. Please mark	

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		the ballot paper as you have just voted. Values: On a scale from 0 to 10 where 0 means you strongly believe that there should be a total ban on abortion in Ireland, and 10 means that you strongly believe that Abortion should be freely available in Ireland to any woman who wants to have one, where would you place your view?	
	Objective knowledge of the constitutional convention (agree/disagree)	***1)*** The participants in the Constitutional Convention were ordinary citizens. ***2)*** Some politicians were included in the Constitutional Convention. ***3)*** The Constitutional Convention recommended a referendum on marriage equality. ***4)*** The Constitutional Convention recommended the abolition of the Seanad.	5)
	Objective knowledge of the referendum issue (agree/disagree)	*1)* As a result of the Yes vote, clergy will be obliged to perform same-sex marriage. *2)* As a result of the Yes vote, same-sex marriage will be protected by the constitution. *3)* As a result of the Yes vote, it will be easier for couples in same-sex marriage to adopt children. 4) Regardless of the Yes vote, the surrogacy rights for both same-sex and heterosexual couples will not change.	5)
Abortion	Vote and value alignment (Voted Yes; Voted No)	Vote: The two choices you just decided between are listed on this ballot paper. Please mark the ballot paper as you have just voted. Values: On a scale from 0 to 10 where 0 means you strongly believe that there should be a total ban on abortion in Ireland, and 10 means	Commissioned by RTE with three univers Conducted by Behaviour and Attitude Exit poll 3 simultaneous surveys 3779 respondents in total

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		that you strongly believe that Abortion should be freely available in Ireland to any woman who wants to have one, where would you place your view?	
	Objective knowledge of the Citizens' Assembly	*1)* Randomly selected Irish citizens discussed the topic of abortion in the Citizens' Assembly. *2)* Only citizens that were in favour of a repeal of the 8th were represented in the Irish Citizens' Assembly. *3)* Experts were invited to inform the discussion of the Citizens' Assembly.	4)
	Objective knowledge of the referendum issue (agree/disagree)	*1)* If a majority of voters vote 'yes' in this referendum, the Oireachtas will still be able to implement strict restrictions on abortions in Ireland. *2)* The current government is a coalition between Fine Gael and the Labour Party.	3)
	Subjective knowledge of the referendum issue	On a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means 'don't understand at all' and 10 means 'fully understand the issues involved', how would you describe your understanding of the issues involved in this referendum?	

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