

**Revealing Preferences:  
Does Deliberation Increase Ideological Awareness  
among the Less Well Educated?**

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## ABSTRACT

Research suggests that the rightist discourse on immigration appeals to left-leaning citizens with lower levels of education. The opposite is, however, not true for right-wing voters with lower educational levels, and this asymmetry leaves left-wing parties at a disadvantage compared with the right on immigration and integration issues (Sniderman et al., 2000). Deliberative theory promises that discussion, information, and reflection can promote a more balanced political discussion and a more enlightened citizen. In this paper, we assess the extent to which deliberative polling increases the ideological awareness of citizens with lower educational levels. More specifically, we gauge the extent to which especially less well educated left-wing voters – those whose attitudes Sniderman et al. find to be particularly out of tune with their ideological predispositions regarding immigration and integration – adjust their attitudes as a consequence of deliberate exposure to informational input and the presentation of two-sided arguments. We make use of unique data generated during the first European-wide deliberative polling project, 'EuroPolis', held in 2009. Our results indicate that less well educated left-wing voters indeed have slightly more negative attitudes towards immigrants than leftist voters with secondary or post-secondary educational levels. Turning to the micro-mechanisms of attitude change in a deliberative setting, our analyses show that both levels of education and ideological predispositions play a role in the extent to which participants of the deliberative poll adjust their attitudes. In three out of four models we find evidence that less well educated left-leaning citizens are indeed most likely to adjust their attitudes on immigration and integration after being presented with a more balanced discussion of the topic.

## INTRODUCTION

In their book published a little over a decade ago Sniderman et al. (2000, 113) argue that attitudes towards immigrants and immigration are asymmetric in terms of ideology and political sophistication. Whereas the expectation is that left-wing voters have more favorable attitudes towards immigrants, Sniderman et al. in fact find that both less sophisticated left-wing voters and less sophisticated right-wing voters tend to have quite negative views about immigrants. This asymmetry gives right-wing parties an advantage over the left as not only right-wing voters, but also some on the left are more easily convinced of the negative effects of immigration on Western societies.

In recent years, as part of the deliberative turn in political theory, empirical research has started to explore the changes in political attitudes and behaviour when information is offered under optimal institutional conditions (see e.g. Chambers, 2003). Several instruments have been suggested to explore the extent to which robust democratic institutions, political participation, and political attitudes can interact in improved institutional arrangements, including deliberative polls, citizen juries, and town meetings. The recurring aim is to combine institutional conditions receptive to democratic discourse and expressive instances (not mediated by political or functional representation of the public) with the perceived influence that a calm, rational, and in-depth discussion may have on the formation of political preferences.

Combining the findings of Sniderman et al. (2000) on attitudes towards immigration with the promise of deliberative theory that discussion, information, and reflection can promote a more balanced political discussion and a more enlightened citizenry, this paper aims to assess the extent to which deliberative polling helps less well educated citizens to become more aware of the policy attitudes that go hand in hand with their self-expressed ideological position.<sup>2</sup> The micro-mechanisms of attitude change are a relatively understudied topic in the deliberative literature. It is not yet entirely clear who changes their attitudes as a result of deliberation and what the mechanism of this is. More generally, we do not even know whether deliberation implies an attitude change model that is different from those discussed in the framework of opinion change in other, less informative, environments. Our expectation is that the presentation of arguments in favor of and against immigration and an in-depth discussion of the topic will be to the particular advantage of those who are less skilled in connecting their policy positions to the ideology they claim to believe. In other words, deliberation may be a tool to increase awareness among the less well educated of the policy positions of both the left and the right on the immigration issue.

In this paper, we focus our discussion on an issue where left-wing participants' ideological positions sometimes clash with their own policy preferences. Our argument, however, is not limited to left-wing proponents and it is not intended to revive the argument known as the authoritarianism of the left. Our argument is more general, addressing the relative role of ideology and information in attitude

change.

Our theoretical starting point is the classical distinction in cognitive psychology between heuristic and systematic information processing in dual-process models of persuasion. The heuristics (or peripheral) route stresses the influence of cues external to the arguments of discussion, while the systematic (or central) one points to the arguments contained in it. Which of these two processes will be used depends on motivational and ability factors, such as interest, education, and level of involvement. Assuming that motivation was high throughout the experiment – an assumption corroborated by different self-assessed measures of interest and involvement – we look at the role played by various levels of ability (assessed through educational attainment) in attitude change. More specifically, we focus on less well educated participants, and assess two competing hypotheses about the relative role of cues and ideology in attitude change.

The first hypothesis follows the line of thought that attitude change is a matter of following cues (Zaller, 1992). Since the discourse on immigration in the media is negatively skewed (Vliegenthart and Roggeband, 2007), balanced discussion should lead attitudes to change in a more positive direction. Therefore, we expect that according to the heuristics route less well educated citizens – whether they place themselves on the left or the right of the ideological spectrum – should be more likely to benefit from the barrage of information to which they are subjected while partaking in the deliberative poll and change their attitudes in the same (positive) direction.

Our second hypothesis is linked to the idea that people do not merely follow cues but also actively process information and connect it with their ideological predispositions. Following this line of thought, we ask ourselves whether those whose stances Sniderman et al. find to be particularly out of tune with their self-expressed ideological beliefs are especially likely to adjust their attitudes to immigration. If this is indeed the case, left-wing less well educated citizens should disproportionately adjust their attitudes regarding immigrants and immigration in a more positive direction after deliberation, a sign that systematic, rather than heuristic, processing was at work.

We assess these implications using data from the first European-wide deliberative poll held one week before the European Elections in 2009: the 'EuroPolis' project. Due to its quasi-experimental design, the data gathered during the research project allow us to compare the attitudes and behavior of respondents who did and those who did not participate in the deliberative poll. This makes the EuroPolis data extremely suitable for the research question at hand. Our results indicate that deliberation does seem to have a differential impact on people, depending on their level of education, and that this impact furthermore depends on the ideological stance of the respondent. In three out of four models, we found that those who are less politically astute and lean to the left are those more likely to change their attitudes regarding immigrants and immigration in a more positive direction. In terms of statistical significance, the link between ideology, education, and attitude

change is slightly stronger where the cultural threat of immigration is concerned than where the economic consequences of immigration and integration are concerned. Admittedly, education, ideology, and a handful of control variables only explain a small part of the variance in attitude change, which implies that our quest to understand the micro-mechanisms of attitude change in deliberative environments is still on-going.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The vulnerability of the left on the immigration issue as described by Sniderman et al. (2000) is rooted in various factors. While more politically aware and better educated citizens demonstrate high levels of correlation between ideological self-placement and attitudes towards socio-political issues, the same is not true for those who are less well educated. Citizens with lower levels of political sophistication make more errors in translating core values into issue attitudes (Jacoby, 2006). Regarding the immigration issue, this distortion or 'misunderstanding' of their values is, however, of a different magnitude for those placing themselves on the left side of the ideological spectrum from that of those placing themselves on the right.

Values such as order, tradition, and national integrity, formally rooted in the political right, appeal not only to right-leaning citizens but also to a high proportion of citizens placing themselves on the left (Sniderman et al., 2000, 116-120). Among those with higher levels of education there is a considerable distance between those who claim to belong to the left or right in terms of agreement with values of order and authority. However, while highly educated left-leaning citizens – as expected – are least likely to adhere to the values described above; less well educated left-leaners are even more likely to adhere to values of order, tradition, and national integrity than highly educated citizens identifying with the right. The fundamental division over these values is thus not between the left and right, but within the left itself, as a significant proportion of left-leaning citizens adheres to the ideological commitments of the right. Sniderman et al. (2000) argue that there is a clear link between immigration and values of authority, as the issue is often framed in terms of order, tradition, and national integrity. Indeed, Vliegenthart and Roggeband (2007, 307-308) showed in a content analysis of Dutch parliamentary documents and media outlets that from the end of the 1990s immigration had increasingly been framed in terms of restrictions and threats (see also Morley and Taylor, 2012 on Italy and the United Kingdom). Limited integration by minorities leads to discussions of existing policies and measures. At the same time, new legislation is increasingly aimed at preventing new influxes of immigration and compelling newcomers to integrate. These findings have to be understood in the light of evidence that there is a relationship between the tone of the political discourse and anti-immigrant attitudes (see e.g. Boomgaarden and Vliegenthart, 2009).

The asymmetric nature of immigration issues for left and right – but remember the argument might be applied to right-wing leaners for other issues such as, for

example, free trade preference – offers a unique opportunity to study the role of ideology and information in attitude change. It was Converse (1964) who sealed the first round of debate on attitude formation, defining the opinions of the American population towards many public issues at best as “non-attitudes”. Converse showed that the general public lacked the capacity to fulfil the requirements of political life in a functioning democracy. Since then, it has been taken for granted that citizens are actually far from the ideal assumed by democratic theorists in terms of knowledge, interest, and motivation to participate in political democratic life. This conclusion, over the years, has been challenged from different angles and with different lines of argument (Althaus, 2003; Erikson et al., 2002; Popkin, 1991; Sniderman et al., 1991; ).

In recent years, as part of the deliberative turn in political theory (see e.g. Chambers, 2003), empirical research has started to look beyond these limits and has explored more closely the potential of public opinion when optimal institutional conditions are offered for carrying out the cognitive tasks citizens are expected to perform. The goal of most of these experiments is to ascertain whether and how individual preferences would change if the information and interest gap that characterizes the public discussion in modern societies were to be filled in. Deliberation is seen as a counter-factual experiment to provide a glimpse of a hypothetical public, one much more engaged with and better informed about politics than citizens in their natural surroundings actually are (Luskin et al., 2002, 458). The results of more than two decades of research are encouraging (see e.g. Delli Carpini et al., 2004; Ryfe, 2005, and Thompson, 2008). Indeed, an increase in the quantity and quality of information, combined with an environment conducive to equal and balanced discussion, produces significant changes in the policy preferences of participants (Fishkin and Luskin, 1999). However, the micro-mechanisms of attitude change are still a relatively understudied topic in deliberative theory. We do not really know who changes their attitudes as a result of deliberation and the mechanism by which this happens. More generally, we do not even know whether deliberation implies an attitude change model that is different from those discussed with regard to opinion change in other, less informative, environments.<sup>3</sup>

To address this gap, a good starting point is the theoretical debate on attitude change in social psychology that traditionally focuses on dual-processing perspectives (e.g. Bohner et al. 2008; Bohner and Dickel 2011; Petty and Cacioppo 1981; Petty and Wegener 1998;). This debate has resonated in the political science literature as well. It was initiated by Zaller (1981), who stressed the nature and direction of the informational environment as the main source of attitude change, especially among those less politically aware. His theoretical approach was subsequently criticized by those, like Sniderman et al. (1991), who stressed the autonomous role of internal predispositions, of which political ideology was among the first to be included, in shaping the way information is processed for both the less well and the better educated. Our analysis can be cast as a contribution to this wider theoretical debate about the relative weight of heuristics and systematic thinking on persuasion in social psychology (Bohner et al., 2008; Bohner and Dickel,

2011; Petty and Cacioppo, 1981) and political science (see e.g. Sniderman et al. 1991 and Zaller 1981). We assess two competing hypotheses that can be placed in the discussion on the role of ideology in attitude change. Both hypotheses revolve around what happens to less well educated citizens once they are embedded in a deliberative context, but they diverge regarding the kind of information processing these people are expected to use in such a context. Of course, we have no way of measuring the actual mental process participants in the deliberative poll use, but we can infer what should happen in such a context from the different implications of the two theoretical routes.

The first hypothesis follows the assumption that attitude change is a peripheral process based on responses to cues. Less well educated citizens face a wider information gap and they are, therefore, more dependent on heuristics than better educated citizens. It is, therefore, the group of less well educated citizens that is considered to change their opinions most as they use the informational cues and heuristics of the deliberative polling process to reconsider their attitudes. In a deliberative poll, the cues on the immigration issue are expected to be more pro-immigration oriented than heuristics on immigration presented in the general political discourse, if for no other reason than that deliberative polls make an explicit effort to ensure an informationally balanced environment. In so doing, a deliberative poll environment corrects the informationally asymmetric immigration discourse discussed above (e.g. Morley and Taylor, 2012; Vliegenthart and Roggeband, 2007). Our first hypothesis, therefore, posits that citizens with lower educational levels will be more likely to adapt their preferences in a more pro-immigration direction regardless of their ideological predispositions. In other words, less well educated citizens participating in the deliberative poll should change their attitudes more than better educated citizens, but we should not find differences between less well educated participants placing themselves on the left and the right.

Our second hypothesis hinges, however, on the assumption that in a deliberative context, citizens do not just follow informational cues, but that they also actively process the information and connect it to their ideological predisposition. We expect that those more likely to err in the translation of values into attitudes on the immigration issue – i.e. less well educated left-wing citizens – will benefit most from the presentation of arguments for and against immigration as well as an in-depth discussion of the topic. Since the attitudes of less well educated left-leaning voters are particularly out of tune with self-expressed ideological beliefs, we argue that deliberative polling should disproportionately lead to attitude change and more positive attitudes towards immigrants and immigration among this subset of participants. Following this second hypothesis, less well educated citizens are still considered to adjust their attitudes on immigration more than better educated participants. However, we expect to see differences between less well educated participants placing themselves on the left or the right of the political spectrum. Becoming more aware of the policy attitudes that go hand in hand with their self-expressed ideological position, those placing themselves on the left will find the discrepancies between earlier held beliefs and the newly provided information

largest. As a result of this, this group is thought to change their attitudes most.

## DATA AND VARIABLES

### The deliberative polling project

To explore the extent to which deliberative polling makes citizens more aware of their ideological stances, we use data gathered under the EuroPolis project, a three-day Deliberative Poll (DP)<sup>4</sup> experiment held in Brussels one week before the European Parliamentary election of June 2009.<sup>5</sup>

There are five main characteristics of a deliberative opinion poll: random recruitment of participants, informational input about the issues discussed in balanced briefing materials, moderated small group discussions, plenary sessions in which questions from the small groups are answered, and repeated attitude measurement. As compared to standard deliberative polls, the EuroPolis-project added two further elements to strengthen the overall research design: first, a control group who did not attend the event but who were given a pre- and post-questionnaire, and, second, a systematic recording of all verbal interactions in the small group discussions to obtain both individual-level and group-level measures of the quality of the discussion.

The EuroPolis opinion poll event focused on two issues – immigration and climate change – selected with the aim of studying the role of deliberation in a highly controversial and emotional political issue. A random sample of approximately 350 EU citizens was invited first to discuss the two selected topics in small groups and later in plenary sessions with policy experts and politicians. This group was proportionally stratified according to the number of seats allocated to each Member State in the EU Parliament. The participants were interviewed 1.) before, 2.) during, 3.) directly after the DP, and 4.) once again a few days after the European Parliamentary elections. Their views are compared to those of a control group – a sample who were not invited to the deliberative weekend – who were questioned both at the stage of participant recruitment (i.e. before the poll) and again after the elections. Figure 1 summarizes the research design of the EuroPolis deliberative poll.

<FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE >

Figure 1. A schematic representation of the research design of the deliberative poll

The recruitment of participants took place in several stages. First, a cross-sectional random sample of the EU's citizen population aged 18 or more was surveyed at the end of April/early May of 2009 (t1, n=4384). The purpose of this survey was to gauge people's policy preferences and levels of knowledge about the two policy issues that would later structure the DP event. Interviewees were randomly assigned to the test or control group, with test group interviewees being invited to take part in the deliberative poll in Brussels at the end of the interview. Those



assigned to the test group who accepted the invitation to take part in the event subsequently received balanced background materials to inform them about the issues to be discussed and to invite them to pay more attention to as well as put more thought into the selected topics. Briefing materials were translated into a total of 21 languages. Experts and politicians who participated in the process of drafting the briefing materials were also invited to attend the DP so as to answer participants' questions during plenary sessions.<sup>6</sup>

Deliberative poll participants, experts, and politicians came together for three days in Brussels over the weekend of May 29-31, 2009. The participants (t2, n=348) filled out a questionnaire upon arrival (t2) and were then randomly assigned to small groups (25 groups in total) to discuss immigration and climate change under the guidance of a moderator. All verbal exchanges occurred in the participants' mother tongue. At the end of the event, before leaving, the test group participants filled out another questionnaire (t3, n=348). Finally, the participants in the polling experiment were questioned again the week after the 2009 European Parliament elections of 4-7 June (t4, n=333). To explore the impact of the DP event, a random sample of the EU population (i.e. control group, n=1005) was surveyed simultaneously with the test group at t4. While the first and last survey were conducted via CATI/CAPI, the second and third were self-administered questionnaires distributed to participants during the polling event.

#### Two indexes of attitudes towards immigrants

All our analyses are based on questions asked to both the test and control group in the first and last wave of the deliberative poll. We use two dependent variables to measure attitudes toward immigrants: a measure of the perceived cultural threat, and a measure of the perceived economic threat from immigration.

A first measure of attitudes toward immigrants taps the perception of how culturally close immigrants have to be in order to be admitted to the respondents' countries. The question asked, on a 0-10 scale, how important each of the following three criteria "should be in deciding what immigrants from non-EU countries should be admitted" to the country: "being able to speak the national language", "commitment to the national way of life", and the fact that the immigrant was "coming from a similar culture". A fourth item asked where the respondents would position themselves, always on a scale from 0 to 10, where "0 means that Muslim immigrants have a lot to offer to [COUNTRY]'s cultural life, 10 means that Muslim immigrants threaten the [NATIONALITY] culture and 5 is exactly in the middle" (see appendix A for the exact wording of questions).

The second index is based on three questions related to economic issues relevant for immigration. The questions were all with the same format, scaled from 0 to 10, and asked about how important "each of the following criteria should be in deciding which immigrants from non-EU countries should be admitted": "having job skills that employers need" and "being able to support oneself financially". The third item asked the respondent's position on a scale 0-10, where "0 means that immigrants

take jobs from native-born [NATIONALITY], 10 means that immigrants take the sorts of jobs that [NATIONALITY] don't want and 5 is exactly in the middle".

We inspected both indexes for unidimensionality through a principal component analysis on the overall sample, including both test and control groups. Both an ocular test of the scree plot, the Kaiser rule, and a set of parallel analyses show that all variables of the respective indexes lay on one single factor.<sup>7</sup> We calculated the mean score of the relevant items and built an index of economic threat and an index of cultural threat. Both indexes take a value of 0 when all the economic or cultural elements are judged as not important and a value of 10 when they are all judged as extremely important. Table 1 reports some descriptive statistics for the cultural threat index. Participants in the deliberative poll seem slightly more relaxed about immigrants threatening the national culture than respondents in the control group. While both groups have a more positive outlook in wave 4, the change is somewhat larger for the test group.

<TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE >

Table 2 reports descriptive statistics on the economic threat index for the test group and the control group in wave 1 and wave 4. Comparisons between the test group and the control group once again show participants in the deliberative poll having a slightly more optimistic outlook and being less inclined to change their attitudes towards more negative perceptions of immigrants. Just as for the cultural threat index over-time changes are small. This is an important observation as it limits the amount of variation to be explained in the subsequent analyses.

<TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE >

#### Independent and control variables

The two explanatory variables of most interest for our research question are ideology and educational level. Ideology is measured through self-placement on a left-right scale running from 0 to 10. Recoded into three dichotomous variables, those that place themselves on the left (categories 0-3) and those that place themselves on the right (categories 7-10) are included in the analyses (with respondents placing themselves at the centre of the scale (4-6) as the reference category). Educational level is measured through a question enquiring at what age the respondent had completed full-time education. For ease of interpretation this variable has been reversed, so that high values denote lower levels of education. If less well educated respondents are more likely to change their attitudes, the coefficient for education should be positive and significant.

Our expectation is that those placing themselves on the right end of the ideological spectrum will generally have less favorable attitudes towards immigrants. Among leftist respondents we assume those with lower levels of education to be considerably less optimistic about immigration than those with higher educational

levels, consequently mirroring 'rightist' attitudes on immigrants and immigration. Following hypothesis one, we expect all less well educated respondents who took part in the deliberative poll (i.e. test group participants) to be more likely to change their attitudes on immigration as this group faces the largest information gap and will, therefore, be most dependent on cues. Following hypothesis two, according to which participants connect informational input to their ideological predispositions, we expect less well educated left-wing voters to change opinions towards immigrants and immigration issues more frequently than other participants in the deliberative poll. More specifically, we assume these respondents to become significantly more positively disposed towards the immigration issue after deliberation, since their more 'rightist' policy attitudes were most out of tune with their self-expressed 'leftist' ideological beliefs. If deliberative polling indeed facilitates attitude change, respondents in the control group should show either no attitude change at all or at most very little.

Apart from our two main independent variables of interest, the analyses presented below include a number of control variables that may affect attitudes towards immigrants as well as changes therein: gender (1=male), age, and religiosity (running from 1=never attends religious services (apart from weddings and funerals) to 8=attends religious services more than once a week). We also include a measure of whether the respondent was born in the country of residence (1=born in country), given that having an immigrant background may influence attitude strength and, therefore, also levels of change. All background variables are measured at t1.

Political knowledge, lastly, is measured in a two-fold manner. The first index measures general knowledge of the European Union and counts the number of correct answers to two questions on a scale from 0 'both answers wrong' to 1 'both answers correct'. Following Luskin et al. (2002) we consider 'don't know' an incorrect answer. The second index is also based on two questions, but relates to – admittedly very specific – knowledge about immigration issues. We include both levels of knowledge measured at t1 in the analyses presented below.

#### Self-selection bias and coarsened exact matching

As with all (quasi-)experimental research, the difficulty of our research design is that our respondents are part of either the test group or the control group but never of both. This leads to a degree of speculation as to what would have happened had participants of the test group not been included in the deliberative poll and vice versa (Rosenbaum and Rubin, 1983). As may be recalled, the test group in our study consists of respondents to the questionnaire administered in wave 1 who agreed to participate in the deliberative poll. Self-selection bias likely plays a role, as it is not a far stretch to assume that those more interested in politics, those better educated, or those with more time on their hands are more favourably inclined to participate in a three-day polling event.

The pre-treatment differences between the test group and the control group make it impossible to conclude that observed differences regarding changes in attitudes

on the immigration issues are truly the effect of participation in the deliberative poll. They could, after all, also be the result of the two groups having slightly different characteristics to start with. Matching minimizes the possibility that observed differences between the outcome of interest are caused by factors other than participation in the deliberative poll.

We thus apply such a matching method to iron out differences between the test and the control group based on fixed characteristics. In essence, matching is a method that allows one to pre-process data by finding matching cases in terms of a number of confounding pre-treatment control covariates in the test group and the control group. Unmatched cases are not used for analysis. The ultimate aim of matching is to arrive at a better balance between the test group and the control group in as much as the distribution of covariates in the two groups is more in tune. Matching leads to results being less model dependent and reduces statistical bias (Dehejia and Wahba, 1998, 1999; Rosenbaum and Rubin, 1983; Rubin, 1987). By obtaining more balance, more meaningful comparisons can be made between the test group and the control group.

Matching methods essentially differ in the way matched cases between the test group and the control group are defined. When data are completely balanced the said pre-treatment covariates do not have to be controlled for any longer, as the treatment effect can no longer depend on these variables. The downside of exact matching is that it often produces few matches, as it is difficult to find identical cases in the test group and the control group when taking into account numerous variables with numerous values. Approximate matching methods specify a metric to match cases between the test group and the control group.

In this paper we apply coarsened exact matching (cem) whereby variables are first categorized in substantially meaningful groups. In the next step, for each test group respondent a control group participant is found who matches exactly on the (coarsened) covariates (Blackwell et al., 2009; Iacus et al., 2011a,b). Cases that do not have an exact match are not considered. Finally, the coarsened values are abandoned and the original values of the matched data are used for the estimation of the causal effect. The coarsening of variables has the advantage that more cases remain available after matching. Moreover, cem is a monotonic imbalance-reducing matching method, which means that adjusting the imbalance of one variable does not affect the maximum imbalance of any other variable. Another specific characteristic of cem is that it balances on the whole distribution of the test and control groups rather than on the mean only.

From a practical point of view coarsened exact matching starts with the calculation of the multivariate imbalance of the unmatched data. Subsequently, a matching algorithm is applied to attempt to improve balance. Once the best matching algorithm is established, matching essentially becomes a weighting scheme. Taking into account age, gender, education, attendance of religious services, and social class, the multivariate imbalance in our data set equals 0.719 on a scale from 0 (no multivariate imbalance) to 1 (complete separation). After applying the cem

algorithm based on age, gender, and education the multivariate imbalance drops to no less than 0.137 while we retain 98.9% of our cases to work with. While various combinations of pre-treatment variables were tried, none of these resulted in such a stark improvement of the balance and such a high number of remaining observations.

## RESULTS

Before starting to assess our hypotheses we need, first of all, to understand whether the asymmetry that Sniderman et al. claim exists on immigration issues is also present in our test and control group. To do so, we broke down our two indexes by levels of education and self-reported ideology. Figure 2 shows four graphs that depict the average scores on the two indexes for the test group and the control group measured at wave 1 using the matched data set. Each of the four graphs shows two lines – one for respondents with lower educational levels and one for respondents with better educational levels – and traces average scores from left to right.

<FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE >

Figure 2. Two indexes of educational level and ideology for test and control groups – wave 1

Note: lay out as follows

2a.	2b.
2c.	2d.

Given that higher scores correspond to more hostile attitudes, the graphs confirm the overall more hostile predispositions of right-leaning citizens towards immigrants. The difference is in the order of 1 to 2 points on an 11-point scale. The graphs, moreover, confirm that for those placing themselves on the left, levels of education influence whether citizens are more or less hostile towards immigrants. The same is less true for right-leaning citizens, as is indicated by the higher degree of congruence between lower and better educated respondents placing themselves on the right of the political spectrum. The difference between lower and better educated respondents is up to 2.5 points on an 11-point scale.

While left-leaning respondents are generally more positively predisposed towards immigrants than those placing themselves on the right, less well educated leftist respondents are much more likely to see immigration as a cultural and an economic threat compared to better educated left-leaning voters. As predicted by Sniderman et al. (2000), they do indeed seem to exhibit attitudes very similar to those placing themselves on the right.

In the next step, the role of education and ideology in attitude change is further assessed in a multivariate setting including other explanatory factors of change. For this purpose we ran a number of OLS regression analyses, which are presented in Table 3. All models are estimated on the matched data set.

<TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE >

Table 3 shows two models for each of the two indexes: one for the test group and one for the control group. The dependent variable in the respective models is the change between wave 4 and wave 1 on the economic threat index and the cultural threat index, where negative scores correspond to respondents becoming more negatively disposed towards immigrants and positive scores mean respondents became more positive with time. The control variables included in the models are described in the previous section.

Two variables are of particular interest for the purpose of answering our research question: the interaction effects between lower educational levels and self-placement on the left or self-placement on the right of the ideological spectrum. If significant, these variables indicate that there is an additive effect for respondents with these characteristics, meaning that less well educated left-leaning or less well educated right-leaning respondents change more than those placing themselves in the centre and also change more than those with better educational levels. If positive for test group respondents, the interaction effects indicate that less well educated left and right leaners are likely to become more positively disposed towards immigrants after having participated in the deliberative poll. These interaction terms should not reach statistical significance in the models of the control group, as these respondents did not partake in the deliberative event.

If we were to find a positive and significant coefficient for less well educated left-leaners only among the test group participants, this would confirm the hypothesis that deliberative polling helps to readjust the attitudes of those that Sniderman et al. found to be most out of tune with their ideological predispositions. If, however, the interaction term with educational level is significant for both left-leaners and right-leaners, we have to conclude that ideology does not play such a crucial role in deliberative attitude change.

The models for the economic threat index confirm the latter hypothesis. Both the interaction term between lower educational levels and left self-placement and the interaction term between lower educational levels and right self-placement are statistically significant and positive for the test group. The interaction terms are not statistically significant in the model for the control group. This indicates that when it comes to the economic threats of immigration, deliberation makes less well educated citizens on the left and the right more inclined to change their attitudes. The models for the cultural threat index, by contrast, paint a different picture. Unlike the interaction term between education and right self-placement, the interaction effect between left self-placement and lower educational levels shows up positive and significant for the test group. This confirms our second hypothesis

that less well educated left-wing citizens are more likely to adjust their attitudes after participating in the deliberative poll.

A second way to assess our hypotheses is to pool the data for the test group and the control group and include a dummy variable and interaction effects for participation in the deliberative poll. We are particularly interested in the coefficient for the three-way interaction effects between lower educational levels, self-placement on the left or right of the ideological spectrum, and being part of the test group. Positive and significant coefficients indicate that less well educated, left-wing/right-wing respondents participating in the deliberative poll are more inclined to change their attitudes on the immigration issue. The results of the models with the three-way interactions are presented in Table 4.

<TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE >

The models in Table 4 seem to provide support for the idea that ideology plays a role in attitude change. The interaction between education, left self-placement and participation in the deliberative poll is statistically significant for both dependent variables. In terms of statistical significance the effect is weaker for the economic threat index than for the cultural threat index. The interaction between education, right self-placement and participation in the deliberative poll is not significant at the  $p < 0.05$  level. Both models, thus, provide support for hypothesis 2 according to which informational input is linked to ideological predispositions mediated through educational levels.

Summarizing, three out of four models point towards a role for ideology in attitude change. Admittedly, all our models perform poorly as is indicated by the low r-square. This implies that our models are underspecified and that factors other than education and ideology, factors that have not been accounted for, play a role in attitude change – whether attitude change is regarded as due to deliberation or not.

## CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

This paper represents an attempt to examine the impact of deliberation and informed discussion in a quasi-experimental context, going beyond simple pre-and post-event comparisons of attitude change. Focusing on the micro-mechanisms of attitude change in a deliberative environment, the aim of our paper was to address the relative role of ideology and information in attitude change. Our results show that, indeed, deliberation has a differential impact on people depending on their ideological predispositions and their level of education. Those participants more likely to change are the ones whose preferences are not in line with their own ideological predispositions and because they are less astute about the connection between their values and policy preferences. Deliberative polls are an instrument that makes it possible for one's true preferences to reveal themselves. This result indicates the importance of the interaction between information and political predispositions in explaining who, in a deliberative setting, will change their

attitudes and to what extent.

While we focus on an issue where the mismatch asymmetry between ideological predispositions and attitudes materializes among left-wing voters, there is no reason to expect that the adaption of preferences based on ideology and educational levels is limited to left-wing voters. Our argument could be cast in a more general way. However, it is also true that few issues present the asymmetric nature that manifests itself with regard to immigrants and immigration, mostly due to the strong appeal that authority values exert on some groups in society.

Our results are tentative in two ways. First, they are not as strong as one could expect. Part of the problem is that we assume that experimental manipulation will have a direct effect on the relationship between ideology and policy preferences, while, as Sniderman has shown in his work, this relationship is in fact mediated by authority values. Second, in this paper we have focused exclusively on less well educated respondents, and we have not explored in detail what happens among the better educated. In particular, we have not assessed whether, as has been suggested by Sniderman et al. (1991), deliberation makes those who are more politically aware and equipped with a wider set of considerations more alert to the complexity of the issues discussed. This – in turn – might reduce the consistency between their ideological leanings and policy preferences rather than further consolidating the link between the two.

Moving to the more general implications of our results, we want to stress three of them here: two theoretical and one political. The first theoretical implication is that our results seem to suggest that ideological stances are more relevant when it comes to assessing the cultural consequences of immigration than when immigration evokes economic considerations. These results are in line with a stream of literature that suggests that identity considerations are far more important than economic ones in explaining (negative) attitudes toward immigrants (e.g. Burns and Gimpel, 2000; McLaren, 2003). Our paper offers a second theoretical contribution to the general debate about the structure of beliefs of the mass public. The heuristic route argues that public preferences are basically driven by the external context, as reflected in elite and media debates. A second view contends, on the contrary, that people hold a stable set of predispositions that interact with the external media environment in complex ways. Our results show people able, when they are set in the proper conditions, to change their minds so as to make their preferences more coherent with their predispositions. This seems to vindicate the view that predispositions and values have an autonomous role to play in orienting people's attitudes. The problem is that quite often, especially among the least politically aware, the connection between values and policy preferences is not so clear.

Last, our paper's conclusions also have political relevance. Immigration issues have two peculiarities. First, as suggested by Freeman (1995, 884), "public opinion in liberal democracies is (...) more indifferent if not more favourable to immigration than it would be if more and better information were available". Second, it has been suggested that immigration worries are "a reliable weapon of last resort for



conservative parties competing with social democrats" (Thränhardt, 1995, 337). The combination of these two elements helps to explain why, typically, when parties of the left are confronted by the mobilizing strategy of right-wing parties, they react to the problem either by pandering to right-wing policy positions or by obfuscating their more liberal positions, afraid of losing the voters who seem closer to law and order values. However, our results, tentative as they are, show that this strategy is in fact counter-productive. Less aware left-wing voters seem to be receptive to information and arguments that clarify policy preferences as compared to their ideological positions. However, they need a more open discussion and clearer cues from their political elites to orient themselves.

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## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Earlier versions of this paper have been presented at the 6th General Conference of the European Consortium for Political Research, Reykjavik, 25-27 August 2011 and at the Workshop 'Change in political attitudes: Panels and experiments', Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, 7-8 June 2012. We thank Paul Sniderman, the panellists and four anonymous reviewers for their comments. Of course, we ourselves bear full responsibility for any mistakes and errors.

<sup>2</sup> While Sniderman et al. (2000) talk in terms of political sophistication, they operationalize this concept through educational levels. Since the measurement of political sophistication is a contentious issue, we have opted to refer simply to education and educational levels. In this paper, we treat education as distinct from standard measures of factual information, typically considered measures of political awareness (e.g. Zaller, 1992). Education is more than a measure of "chronic" information (Alvarez and Brehm, 2002, 35-38), and Sniderman, following Dewey, contends that education is an indicator of democratic citizenship in both a normative and an empirical sense (see also Sniderman et al., 1991, 9-11).

<sup>3</sup> For one of the few reviews explicitly addressing this issue, see Krupnikov et al. (2007)

<sup>4</sup> The Deliberative Poll is a highly structured deliberative design invented by James Fishkin that has by now been implemented in more than 50 places at the local, national, and European level. For more information on the substantive topics and designs of each Deliberative Poll, see <http://cdd.stanford.edu/>.

<sup>5</sup> The research project was funded by the EU 7th Framework Programme (grant agreement SSH7-CT-2009-225314) and by a group of European donors, led by the Compagnia di San Paolo (Italy), together with the King Baudouin Foundation (Belgium), the Bosch Foundation (Germany), and the Open Society Institute (Switzerland). An international team of European universities conducted the project.

<sup>6</sup> The penultimate version of the briefing material was tested for comprehensibility and balance. For this purpose, the document was translated into three languages (Italian, German, French) and its content was tested in these three countries using small group discussion (on average 20 persons with different backgrounds were selected) in order to assess the clarity of the document and its balance. Following the recommendations arising from these tests as well as those of the scientific partners, the final version in English was translated into 21 languages by EOS-TNS Opinion national agencies. When asked whether the briefing material clearly favored some positions over others (with 0 meaning "the briefing material clearly favored some positions over others", 10 meaning the material was "completely balanced", and 5 being exactly "in the middle") the average score was 6.57 and the median category was 7 for the participants of the poll.

<sup>7</sup> The first factor in both indexes explains 47% of the variance, with an eigenvalue on the first factor of 1.414 for the economic threat index and 1.878 for the cultural threat index.

## TABLES AND FIGURES

Figure 1. A schematic representation of the research design of the deliberative poll

Figure 2. Two indexes of educational level and ideology for test and control groups – wave 1

Note: lay out as follows

2a.	2b.
2c.	2d.

Table 1. Cultural threat index – descriptive statistics before and after, test and control group

	Control group		Test group	
	Wave 1	Wave 4	Wave 1	Wave 4
	(Range 0-10)	(Range 0-10)	(Range 0-10)	(Range 0-10)
Mean	5.83	5.74	5.52	5.25
Median	6.00	5.75	5.75	5.25
SD	2.07	2.07	2.09	2.03
N	912	900	319	321

Table 2. Economic threat Index – descriptive statistics before and after, test and control group

	Control group		Test group	
	Wave 1	Wave 4	Wave 1	Wave 4
	(Range 0-10)	(Range 0-10)	(Range 0-10)	(Range 0-10)
Mean	6.32	6.57	6.10	6.25
Median	6.33	6.67	6.33	6.33
SD	1.87	1.68	2.10	1.86
N	932	971	317	331

Table 3. Change on the two indices (wave 4 – wave 1) by ideological self-placement and education – test and control group separated

	Economic threat index		Cultural threat index	
	test group b/(se)	control group b/(se)	test group b/(se)	control group b/(se)
Age	0.019*** (0.006)	0.005 (0.003)	0.001 (0.007)	0.001 (0.006)
Gender	0.074 (0.275)	-0.140 (0.139)	0.217 (0.155)	-0.180 (0.145)
Education	-0.065** (0.030)	-0.029 (0.032)	-0.028 (0.031)	0.031 (0.022)
Religiosity	0.080* (0.042)	-0.005 (0.042)	-0.013 (0.049)	-0.048 (0.029)
Immigration knowledge	-0.528 (0.418)	-0.628* (0.336)	0.662* (0.364)	0.221 (0.374)
General knowledge	0.749 (0.468)	0.071 (0.325)	-0.400 (0.433)	0.224 (0.315)
Left self-placement	-4.163*** (1.045)	-1.130 (1.050)	-2.567*** (0.852)	0.767 (0.499)
Right self-placement	-2.624** (1.075)	-1.076 (1.028)	-2.027 (1.322)	1.164 (0.821)
Born in country?	0.096 (0.397)	-0.328 (0.202)	0.205 (0.413)	0.069 (0.425)
Left *low education	0.179*** (0.051)	0.053 (0.047)	0.114*** (0.039)	-0.035 (0.022)
Right *low education	0.120** (0.048)	0.062 (0.040)	0.094 (0.060)	-0.046 (0.037)
Constant	-0.066 (0.962)	0.568 (0.639)	0.588 (0.905)	-0.550 (0.641)
N	261	807	257	737
R <sup>2</sup>	0.097	0.019	0.045	0.010

p-levels: \*<.10, \*\*<0.05, \*\*\*<0.01



Table 4. Change on the two indices (wave 4 – wave 1) by ideological self-placement and education – test and control group pooled

	Economic threat index b/(se)	Cultural threat index b/(se)
Age	0.008** (0.003)	0.001 (0.005)
Gender	-0.086 (0.125)	-0.078 (0.130)
Education	-0.140 (0.179)	0.253* (0.148)
Religiosity	0.018 (0.032)	-0.039 (0.028)
Immigration knowledge	-0.537** (0.253)	0.350 (0.278)
General knowledge	0.273 (0.287)	0.023 (0.252)
Left self-placement	-0.686 (0.698)	0.618 (0.486)
Right self-placement	-0.748 (0.952)	1.080 (0.657)
Born in country?	-0.197 (0.175)	0.146 (0.346)
Test group	1.433* (0.828)	1.518* (0.767)
Left*test group	-3.588** (1.342)	-3.309*** (1.058)
Right*test group	-1.683 (1.408)	-3.142* (1.753)
Low education*test group	-0.055 (0.039)	-0.057 (0.035)
Left *low education	0.033 (0.031)	-0.028 (0.023)
Right *low education	0.046 (0.038)	-0.042 (0.031)
Left*low education*test group	0.149** (0.065)	0.146*** (0.050)
Right*low education*test group	0.068 (0.061)	0.141* (0.080)
Constant	-0.460 (0.297)	-0.130 (0.428)
N	1068	994
R <sup>2</sup>	0.029	0.016

p-levels: \*<.10, \*\*<0.05, \*\*\*<0.01

## APPENDIX A: CONSTRUCTION OF INDICES

### 1. Cultural threat index

Q10 - On a 0-10 scale, where '0' is "extremely unimportant", '10' is "extremely important", and '5' is "exactly in the middle", how important or not would you say each of the following criteria should be in deciding which immigrants from non-EU countries should be admitted to [COUNTRY]?

Q10.3 – Being able to speak [NATIONAL LANGUAGE].

Q10.7 – Commitment to the [NATIONALITY] way of life.

Q10.8 – Coming from a similar culture.

Q15 - On a scale from 0 to 10 where 0 means that Muslim immigrants have much to offer to [COUNTRY]'s cultural life, 10 means that Muslim immigrants threaten [NATIONALITY] culture, and 5 is exactly in the middle, where would you position yourself on this scale, or haven't you thought much about that?

### 2. Economic threat index

Q10 - On a 0-10 scale, where '0' is "extremely unimportant", '10' is "extremely important", and '5' is "exactly in the middle", how important or not would you say each of the following criteria should be in deciding which immigrants from non-EU countries should be admitted to [COUNTRY]?

Q10.1 – Having job skills that employers need.

Q10.6 – Being able to support themselves financially.

Q16 – On a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means that immigrants take jobs from native-born [NATIONALITY], 10 means that immigrants take the sorts of jobs that [NATIONALITY] don't want and 5 is exactly in the middle, where would you position yourself on this scale, or haven't you thought much about that?

### 3. General knowledge

Q43 – Is the main decision-making body of the European Union the...?<sup>8</sup>

1. European Commission
2. Council of Ministers \*
3. European Parliament
4. European Court of Auditors

Q44 – Only one of the following statements about the European Parliament is false. Which one is it?

1. It passes all EU laws\*
2. It can dismiss the European Commission
3. It can reject the budget proposed by the Council of Ministers
4. It is involved in decisions about the admission of new Member States

#### 4. Immigration knowledge

Q46 – Which of the following is true of Blue Card workers?

1. They can work anywhere in the EU
2. They must have a university education\*
3. They cannot bring family members to join them any faster than other immigrants
4. They are subject to the Returns Directive

Q47 – Which of the following is true about the ways in which immigration policy is currently made?

1. The EU sets the basic rules about entry and residency requirements\*
2. The EU decides how many immigrants can be admitted to each country
3. Work permits for immigrants must be approved by the EU
4. The EU plays no role in immigration policy.

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<sup>8</sup> Correct answers are denoted by an asterisk.

APPENDIX B: RELATIVE FREQUENCIES TEST AND CONTROL GROUP FOR BOTH INDICES - WAVE 1

Table 5. Cultural threat index – Comparison test and control group (in %) at wave 1

	Being able to speak the language		Commitment to the national way of life		Coming from a similar culture		Muslim immigrants have much to offer	
	Test	Control	Test	Control	Test	Control	Test	Control
Extremely unimportant	8	7	8	7	34	25	12	7
1	2	1	2	1	1	3	1	2
2	3	2	3	2	7	6	5	4
3	4	3	5	2	6	6	9	6
4	1	3	2	3	6	5	8	5
5	15	15	11	16	20	21	31	34
6	6	5	4	5	6	6	7	6
7	12	9	12	11	5	7	8	5
8	13	13	20	13	8	8	7	7
9	8	8	5	7	1	2	1	4
Extremely important	29	33	29	32	6	9	9	12
DK/RA	1	1	0	1	0	1	3	7
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
(N)	333	1005	333	1005	333	1005	333	1005

Table 6. Economic threat index – Comparison test and control group (in %) at wave 1

	Have job skills employers need		Being able to support themselves		Immigrants take jobs nationals do not want	
	Test	Control	Test	Control	Test	Control
Extremely unimportant	9	6	7	5	6	5
1	1	1	1	1	2	2
2	3	2	2	2	2	3
3	3	3	2	2	4	3
4	1	2	3	2	2	2
5	14	19	12	13	23	24
6	8	8	7	4	5	6
7	15	11	11	9	9	10
8	15	17	17	15	14	15
9	4	5	6	8	5	4
Extremely important	29	26	32	38	25	22
DK	1	2	1	1	3	4
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
(N)	333	1005	333	1005	333	1005