

Enhancing Deliberative Quality and Exploring the Perceived Legitimacy of Citizens' Juries

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With ethical approval from Alliance Bioversity & CIAT.

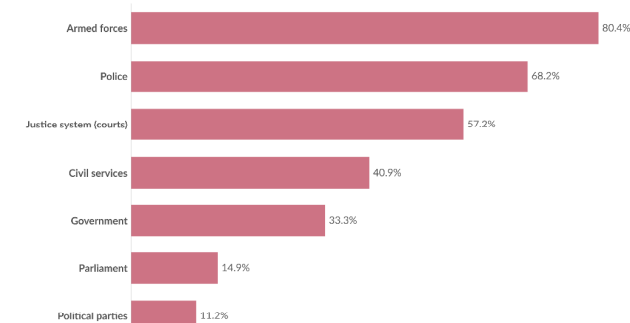
Pre-registered at AsPredicted: <https://aspredicted.org/vc4g-bhkn.pdf>

Crisis in Representative Democracies?

- Low levels of trust in politicians, political institutions and increasing political polarization
- Policies often face resistance not because of their content, but because of who proposes them
- Environmental policies are especially vulnerable to distrust, lobbying, and contestation
 - High value pluralism
 - Benefits are collective, uncertain, and long-term
 - Threaten powerful economic interests
- Lack of perceived legitimacy (technocratic and distant) undermines long-term compliance and cooperation

Trust in institutions, United States, 2022

Share of survey respondents stating that they trust various institutions¹.



Data source: Integrated Values Surveys (2022)

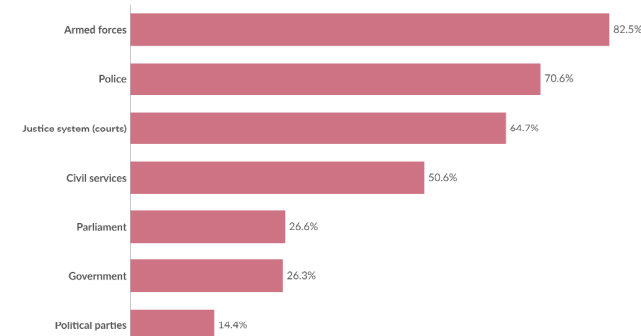
Note: Trust here corresponds to responding "trust completely" or "trust somewhat" in each case.

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¹ The question asked was: I am going to name a number of organizations. For each one, could you tell me how much confidence you have in them: Is it a great deal of confidence, quite a lot of confidence, not very much confidence or none at all?

Trust in institutions, United Kingdom, 2022

Share of survey respondents stating that they trust various institutions¹.



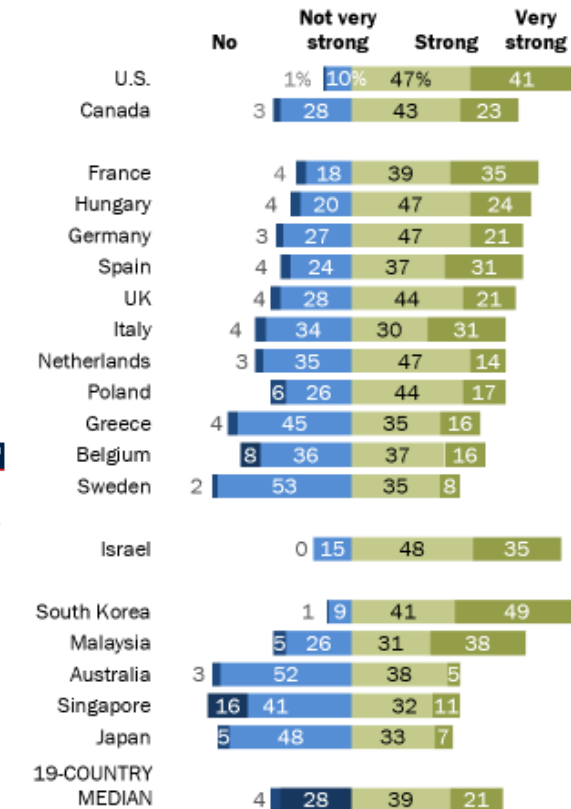
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% who say there are ___ conflicts between people who support different political parties in their country



Note: Those who did not answer not shown.

Source: Spring 2022 Global Attitudes Survey. Q32a.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Alternatives and Complementary Approaches to Policy-Making

Approach	Goal / Strength	Whose Knowledge?	Legitimacy / Transformative	Criticism / Limitation
Nudges	Cost-effective behavior change	Behavioral science; policy designers	Low – short-term, individual behavior	Undermines agency and transparency
Expert Panels	Evidence synthesis	Scientific elites	Medium – potential for negotiated solutions	Technocratic; excludes public
Multi-Stakeholder Platforms	Facilitate dialogue among organized interests	Institutional, interest group knowledge	Medium – potential for negotiated solutions	Co-opted by strong actors
Mini-publics (e.g., Citizens' Juries)	Inclusive, reasoned deliberation by lay citizens	Diverse, lived, and local knowledge	High – reframing of issues, potential for value shifts, learning	Scalability and institutional uptake
...				

Transformative potential refers to the capacity of a policymaking approach to challenge dominant assumptions, enable deeper shifts in values, reshape relationships between (co-creation), trigger structural change, not just behavioral adjustment.

Why Deliberation Matters?

- Traditional decision-making : Technocratic rule → Facts dominate, but public values are ignored.
- Populism or polarization → Values dominate, but facts are distorted.
- Deliberation addresses the crisis of legitimacy by engaging citizens in reasoned dialogue. When people perceive a policy as legitimate, they are more likely to comply voluntarily Dickson et al. (2022)
 - Engaging in reasoned discussions with diverse perspectives helps individuals move beyond ideological positions.
 - Fact-Based Deliberation: Experts present evidence, but discussions allow for ethical and contextual concerns.
 - Deliberation forces participants to critically evaluate different viewpoints rather than reinforcing echo chambers.
 - Help to better understand the reasoning behind opposing views, fostering more open-mindedness.
 - Emphasizes shared goals and values, shifting discussions from partisan conflicts to cooperative problem-solving.

Example: Citizens' Assemblies / Juries

- Selection: Participants are chosen randomly, ensuring diversity in demographics and viewpoints.
- Learning Phase: Experts, stakeholders, and facilitators provide background information on the topic.
- Deliberation Phase: Participants discuss, reflect, and engage in structured debates.
- Decision-Making: They develop recommendations or policy proposals, often presented to policymakers.

Why Deliberation Matters?

Bridging the Representation Gap

- Parliaments often do not fully reflect the societal structure, leading to policy decisions that may overlook the lived experiences of different social groups.
- Citizens' Assemblies help counterbalance this bias by bringing together a randomly selected, demographically diverse group of people.

Example: Germany's Bundestag vs. General Population

	Bundestag (2021)	General Population
Women	31% (Bundestag)	~50%
University Degree (Hochschulabschluss)	87% (Bundestag)	19% (destatis)
Lawyer	21% (Deutschlandfunk)	?
Economists & Business administration	15% (Deutschlandfunk)	?

How Citizens' Juries/Assemblies Help

- Random selection ensures that gender, education, and socioeconomic status better reflect society.
- Such diverse groups allows to incorporate diverse lived experiences often missing in elite-driven processes.
- Decision-making processes that mirror realities of citizens' may increase trust and acceptance in policy outcomes.

Where have they been implemented?

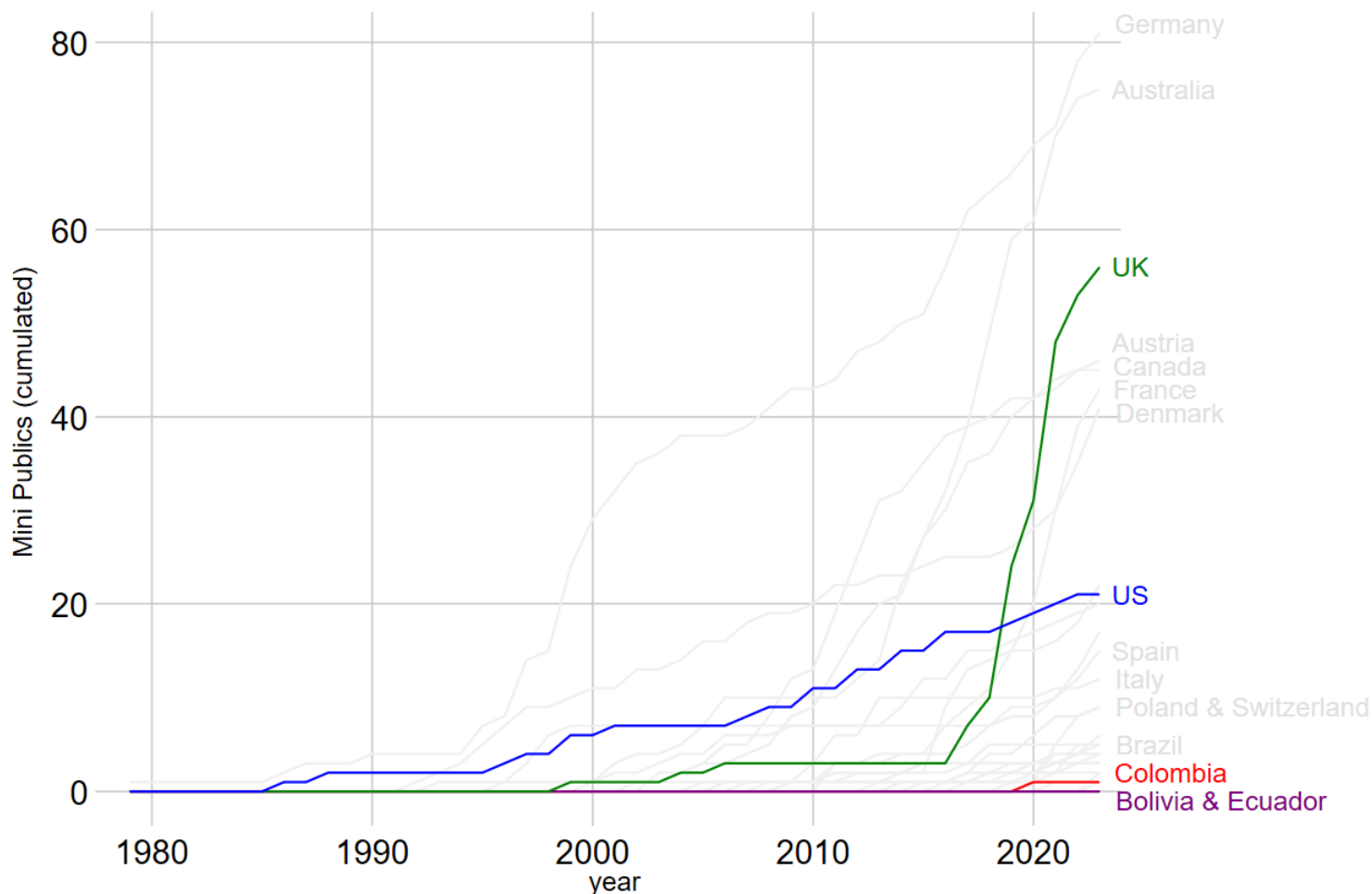
Mini-Publics around the world between 1970-2019

- = Planning Cell
- = Consensus Conference
- = Citizens Jury
- = Deliberative Poll
- = World Wide Views
- = Shimin Togikai
- = Citizens' Assembly
- = Citizens' Initiative Review
- = Other
- = Not defined



Map: <https://sfb1265.github.io/mini-publics/>

Mini-Publics over time (OECD Deliberative Democracy Database, 2023)



- Emergence of mini-publics in 70s in USA and Germany
- Between 1970 and 2023, 713 events counted in the OECD-Database
 - Global North: 705 (99%)
 - Global South: 8 (1%)
- All mini-publics recorded in the OECD-Database in the Global South were conducted in Latin America: Argentina (1), Brazil (5), Colombia (1), Mexico (1)

Our Research on Mini-Publics (1)



- Cooperative research project within CGIAR initiative **Mitigate+**
 - **Title:** Applying Citizens' Juries to the Global South
- Research can roughly be broken down into two parts:
- **First part:** Investigating the participatory and deliberative decision-making processes within citizens' juries and how participation affects jurors
 - We conducted four juries in Bogotá, Colombia
 - **Topic:** Food system sustainability (How consumption of dairy/meat products is linked to agricultural practices in the Colombian Amazon) – five days and approx. 25 participants per jury
 - **Quantitative research:** How participation affects mental models/system thinking, de-polarization, perceived self-efficacy and environmental preferences
 - Survey with participants and non-participants
 - **Qualitative research:** Investigating the deliberative processes within juries and policy proposals
 - Working paper "Bias alleviation and value activation in citizens' juries"
<https://hdl.handle.net/10568/169372>

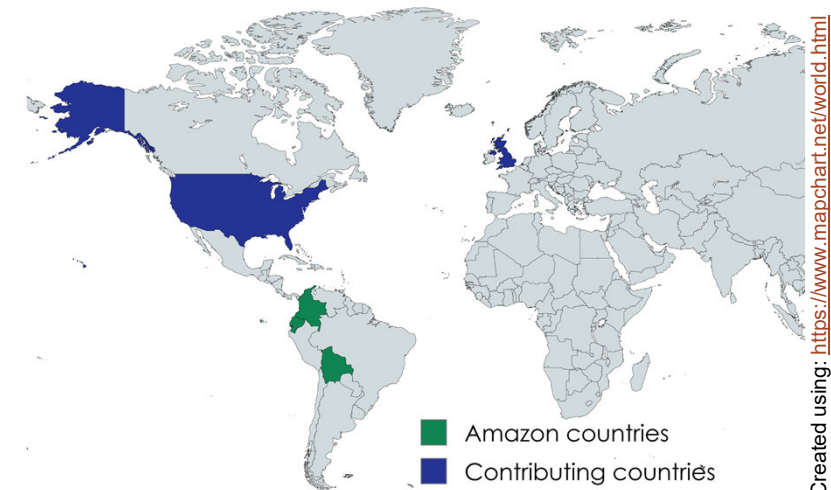
Our Research on Mini-Publics (2)

- **Today's Focus:** Online survey in 5 countries on the perceived legitimacy of citizens' assemblies in the context of environmental policymaking relative to other approaches (expert panel, MSP, ruling party)
- Previous literature:
 - Perceived legitimacy of mini-publics is typically analyzed across three dimensions: input legitimacy (representativeness of participants), output legitimacy (impact of recommendations), and throughput legitimacy (quality of deliberation)
 - Mini-Publics increase legitimacy perceptions among broader citizenry (Germann, 2025; Germann et al., 2022) and generate public trust even across political views (Setälä et al., 2021)
 - Limited empirical evidence on the legitimacy of mini-publics across different countries and their perception by the wider public, especially in the Global South
- Our research:
 - Adds a justice-based evaluative dimension—including procedural, recognition, and restorative justice—especially relevant in contexts with structural inequalities, such as the Global South.
 - How does the perceived impact, justice and legitimacy of a Citizens' Assembly compare against alternative approaches of political decision-making in the context of deforestation in the Amazon?
 - Choice experiment to assess the most desired components of a Citizens' Assembly

Methodology (Overview)

Online survey across 5 countries (N ~ 3,150)

- Countries bordering the Amazon
Bolivia (N=689), Colombia (N=811), Ecuador (N=724)
- Countries financially contributing to the Amazon protection
UK (N=412), and US (N=412)



Survey Experiment: Perceived legitimacy of participatory vs. traditional procedures

- Participatory: Citizens' assembly, Multi-Stakeholder Platform
- Traditional: Ruling Party, Expert Panel
- Eliciting expected impact of policy derived and perceived legitimacy and justice of the process

Discrete Choice Experiment (DCE): Preferences for specific design choices for mini-public

- When conducting mini-publics, implementing actors face several trade-offs
- Design choices: binding vs. advisory role, inclusiveness, deliberation depth, financial cost to taxpayer

SURVEY EXPERIMENT

Survey Experiment: Design

Introduction

- Statement and visualization of the problem of ongoing deforestation in the Amazon region
- US/UK: Added information on financial contribution of US/UK to Amazon conservation efforts

Description of procedure

- Government establishing either of the four procedures to suggest policies for Amazon conservation
- Description of specific procedure for CA
 - Group composition (e.g., randomly invited citizens)
 - Knowledge of participants (e.g., informed by experts)
 - Decision making (e.g., deliberation among members)
 - Strengths and limitations summarized

Perception of process

- Elicitation of expected impact of policy, and perceived fairness and legitimacy of process

Medida de política ambiental

El cambio climático y la degradación del medio ambiente son problemas graves que necesitan acción urgente. La deforestación, especialmente en la selva amazónica, es una de las causas principales. El Amazonas es muy importante para todo el mundo porque ayuda a regular el clima, mantiene la biodiversidad y apoya a las comunidades indígenas.

La Amazonía, rica en biodiversidad y vital para las comunidades indígenas



Política desarrollada por una Asamblea Ciudadana

En respuesta a estos desafíos, el Gobierno de Colombia/Bolivia/Ecuador decidió conformar una **Asamblea Ciudadana** para desarrollar recomendaciones de política sobre la protección de la Amazonía y la mejora del sistema alimentario. El Gobierno se comprometió a considerar estas recomendaciones en la formulación de futuras políticas.

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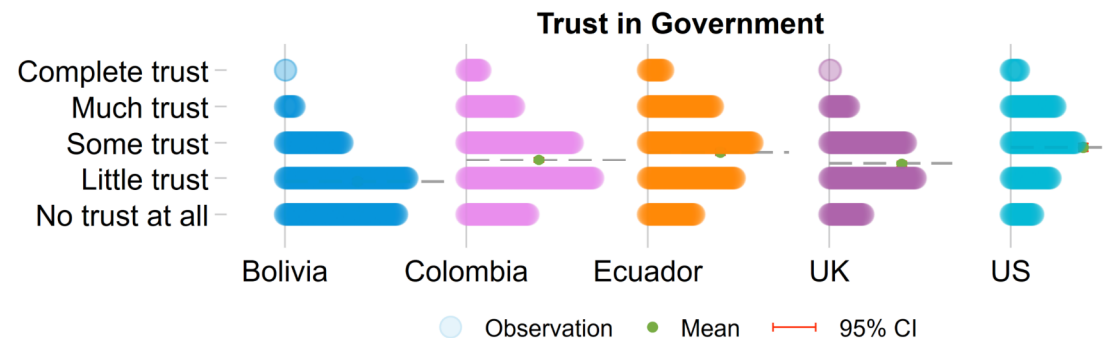
Other Treatments

- The Citizens' Assembly was composed of 100 randomly selected citizens from different regions of the country to ensure diverse perspectives. The selection process was conducted by an independent body to prevent political interference. The members of the Assembly received information from experts on various topics. These experts were invited by independent organizers to provide diverse and balanced insights. The entire process was facilitated by civil society organizations, without direct government involvement.
- The Expert Panel was composed of specialists in environmental science, economics, agriculture, and social sciences to ensure a comprehensive and interdisciplinary approach. The selection process was conducted by the Government, based on academic and professional credentials. The members of the panel analyzed extensive data, including satellite imagery, field studies, and statistical models, to assess the causes and consequences of deforestation. The entire process was organized and facilitated by government-appointed scientific advisors.
- The Multi-Stakeholder Platform was composed of representatives from government, Indigenous communities, environmental NGOs, businesses, and academia. The selection process was conducted by the Government, with invitations extended to key stakeholders in each sector. The members of the platform received information from experts on various topics. These experts were invited by platform organizers to provide diverse and balanced insights. The entire process was organized and facilitated by a government-appointed coordination team.
- The Task Force was composed of ruling party members with relevant expertise and interest in the topic. The selection process was determined by internal party procedures. The members of the Task Force received information from experts on various topics. These experts were invited by the party leadership to provide diverse and balanced insights. The entire process was organized and facilitated within the party structure.

Descriptives

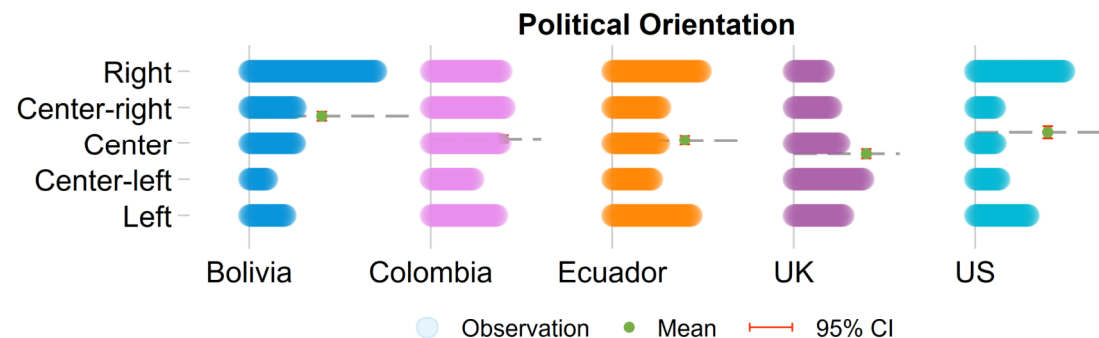
Trust in Government

- Generally, rather low trust towards Government
- Particularly low in Bolivia



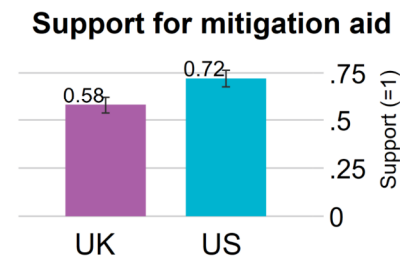
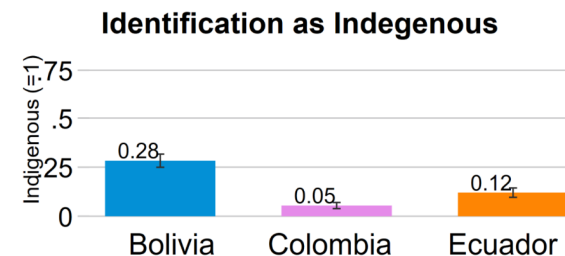
Political Orientation

- Bolivia: Right leaning (Right: 46%)
- Colombia: Balanced (All but center-left ~21%)
- Ecuador: Polarized (Left: 26% Right: 29%)
- UK: Left leaning (Left: 21% Center-L: 30%)
- US: Polarized (Left: 25% Right : 43%)



Identification as Indigenous (Latin)

- In Bolivia high identification as indigenous



Support for mitigation aid (Anglo)

- UK & US medium to high share supporting financial aid to other countries to combat environmental challenges

Survey Experiment Descriptives

Impact

- Perceived significance of the policy's societal impact if implemented.

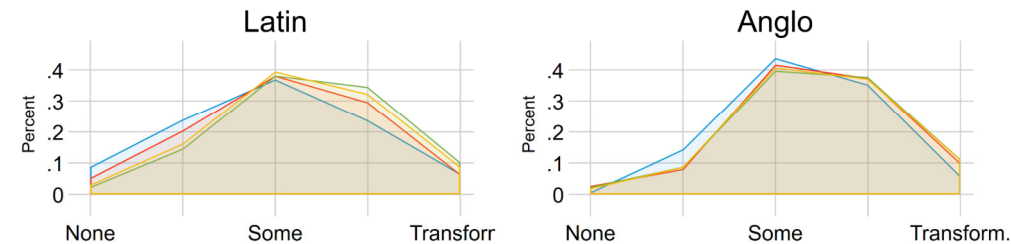
Justice (Index)

- Inclusion of affected communities with genuine influence in decisions (procedural), Integration of local knowledge and cultural aspects in policymaking (recognition), and Efforts to address or avoid reinforcing structural inequalities (restorative)

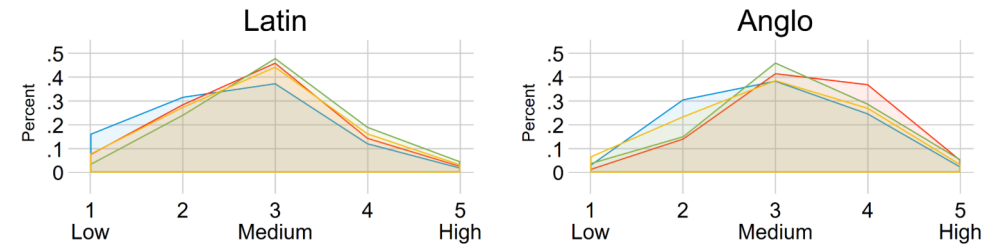
Legitimacy (PCA)

- General legitimacy, perceived transparency of process, assumed knowledge of members on the matter, and expected support among the public to a policy derived by described approach
 - legitimacy measure is slightly broader than (Setälä et al., 2021) and focused on public confidence in the process

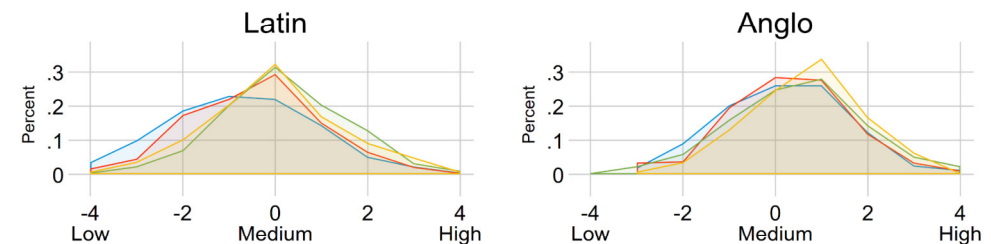
Impact



Justice (Index)

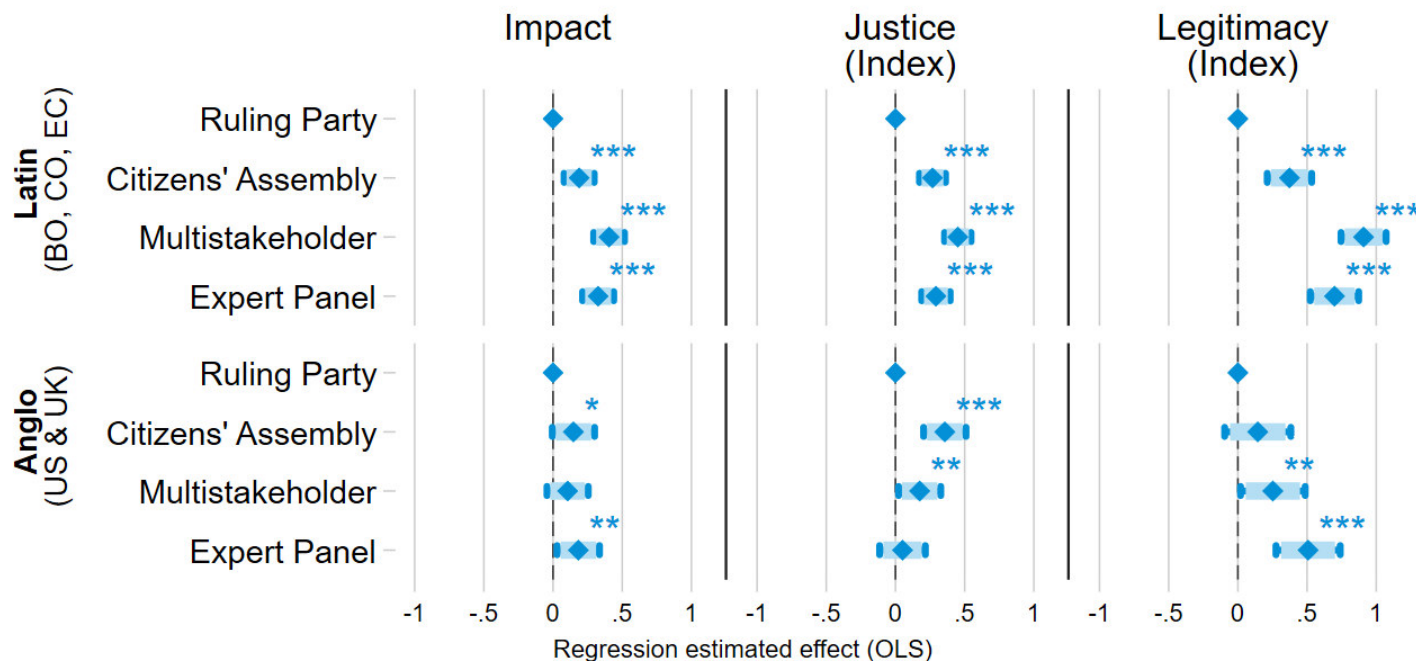


Legitimacy (PCA)



Survey Experiment: Average Treatment Effects

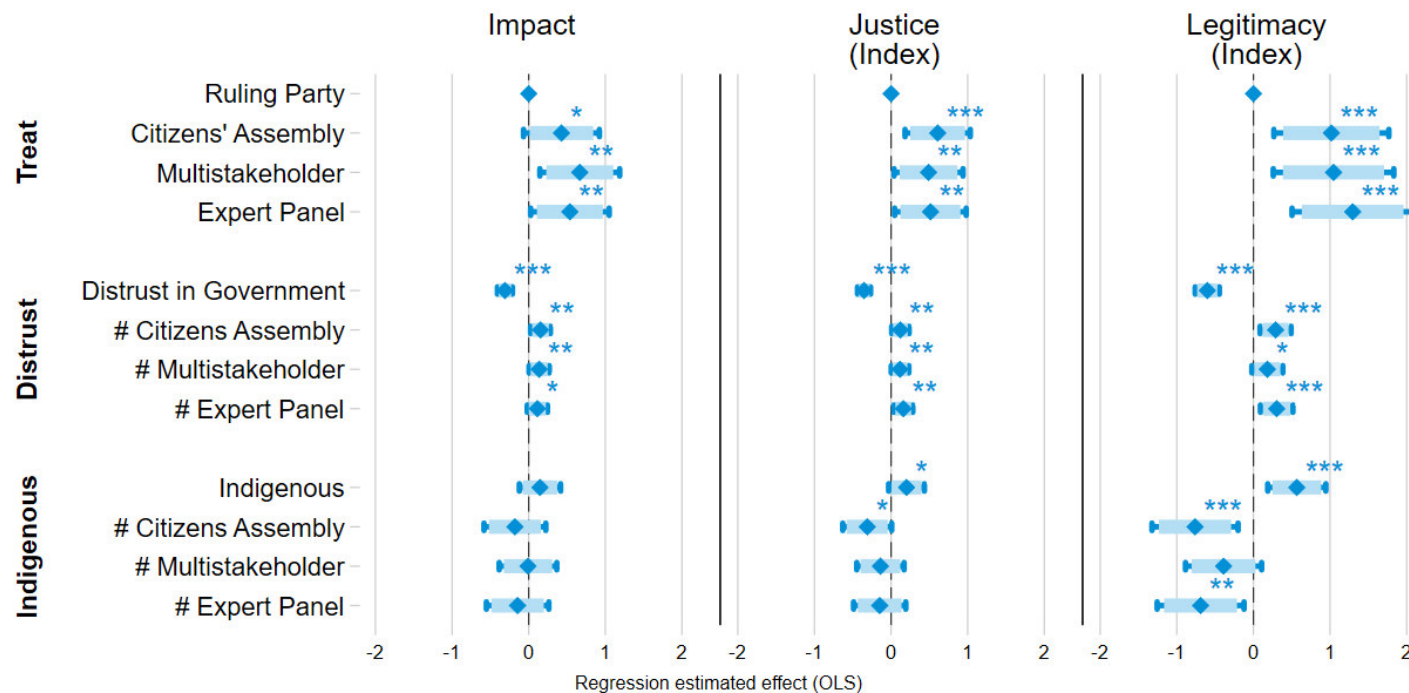
- **Latin:** All alternative forms seen as more impactful, just and legitimate than ruling party, with MSP scoring highest
- **Anglo:** Citizens Assembly most just, but least legitimate. No difference in impact to MSP & EP



Survey Experiment: Evaluation by those **most affected**

Participants from the **Latin American** countries (Bolivia, Colombia, and Ecuador) differ in terms of their trust towards government and relatedness to the Amazon

- **Distrust:** Distrust towards governments (1 Trust |---| 5 Distrust. Means: BOL 4.1, COL 3.5, ECU 3.3)
- **Indigenous:** Identifying themselves as indigenous (BO 20%, CO 5%, EC 12%)



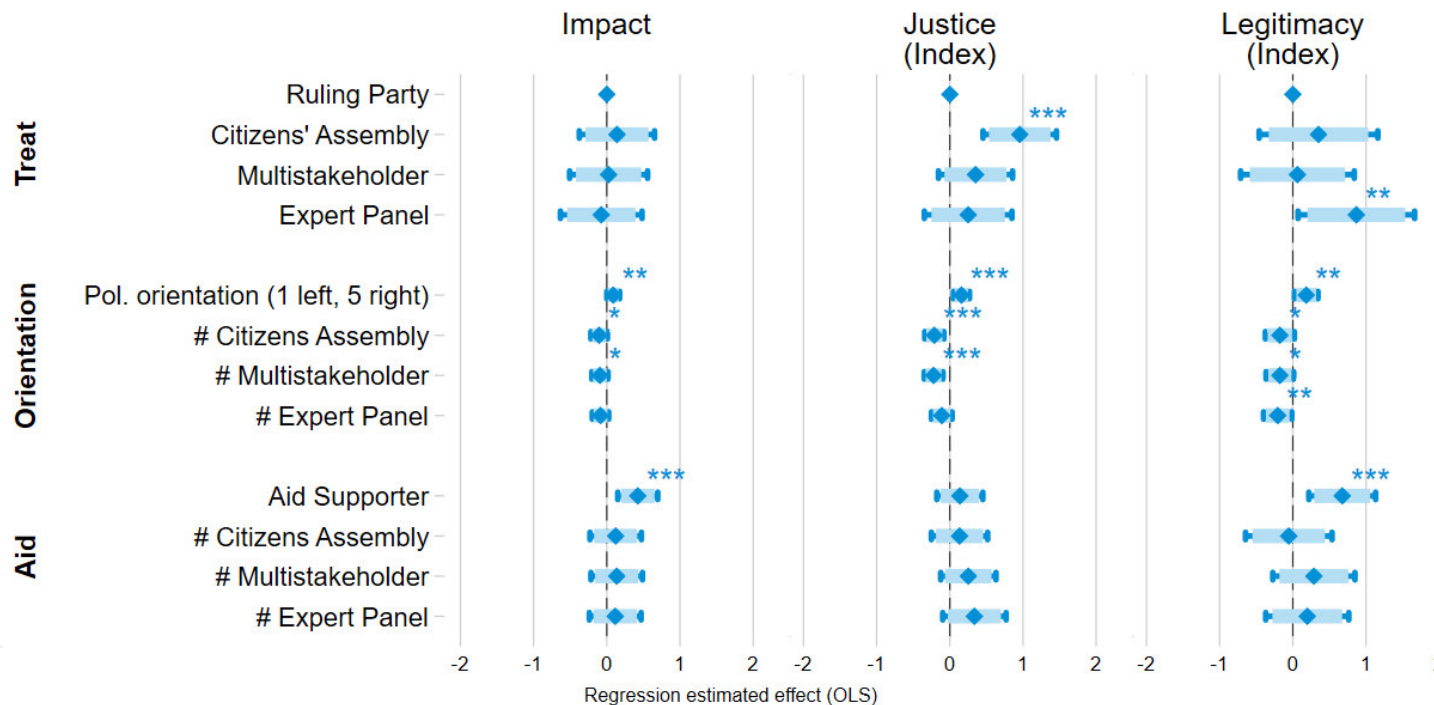
➤ **Distrust** in government increases perceived justice of alternative political processes

➤ **Indigenous:** While those identifying as indigenous generally perceive action as more positive, action by Government is perceived most positive

Survey Experiment: Evaluation by those **financially contributing**

Participants from the **Anglo** countries (UK and US) were asked regarding their political orientation and general perception of aid to foreign countries

- **Political Orientation:** Political orientation (1 Left |---| 5 Right. Means: UK 2.7, US 3.3)
- **Mitigation aid:** Supporting own government to provide climate change aid to other countries (UK: 58%, US: 72%)



- When including political orientation, **average treatment effects** become non-significant
- **Political orientation:** More left-wing orientation increases perceived justice of alternative political processes
- **Aid:** Being in favor of aid increases overall rating of impact and legitimacy; However, not depending on who proposes policy

Summary of Results

➤ Latin America (Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador)

- All alternative formats (MSP, Expert Panel, Citizens' Assembly) rated more legitimate, just, and impactful than the ruling party.
 - Distrust in government further increases appreciation of participatory processes.
- MSPs rated highest in impact, legitimacy and justice.
- Indigenous identity linked to more favorable perception of government-led action, though still supportive of alternatives.
 - Identification of indigenous difficult and mainly from Bolivia where ruling party has indigenous leader

➤ Anglo countries (UK, US):

- Citizens' Assemblies rated highest in justice, but not in legitimacy—expert panels remained more trusted and impactful.
- Political orientation matters: more left-leaning respondents evaluated participatory formats more positively.

DISCRETE CHOICE EXPERIMENT

Design Discrete Choice Experiment

➤ **Setting:** To combat Amazon deforestation, Amazon countries have decided to allocate international donor funding to this cause, using Citizens' Assembly recommendations. The policy proposal originates from a Citizens' Assembly, a group of randomly selected citizens convened to deliberate and make policy recommendations. This particular Citizens' Assembly comprises 100 individuals and was created and facilitated by civil society organizations without government interference.

- **Role of assembly:** *informative, consultative, binding*
- **Inclusivity and representativeness:** *minimal, moderate, high*
- **Depth of deliberation:** *basic (2 weekends), extensive (8 weekends)*
- **Method of reaching consensus:** *simple majority vote, absolute majority, consensus*
- **Additional annual taxpayer burden:** *five levels (PPP)*

	Assembly 1	Assembly 2	Assembly 3
Role of the Citizens' Assembly	Consultative 	Binding 	Informative 
Inclusivity and representativeness of participants	Minimal 	Moderate 	High 
Depth of deliberation	Basic 	Extensive 	Basic 
Method of reaching consensus	Simple majority 	Absolute majority 	Consensus 
Additional costs to taxpayers (annual)	\$ 35	\$ 140	\$ 140

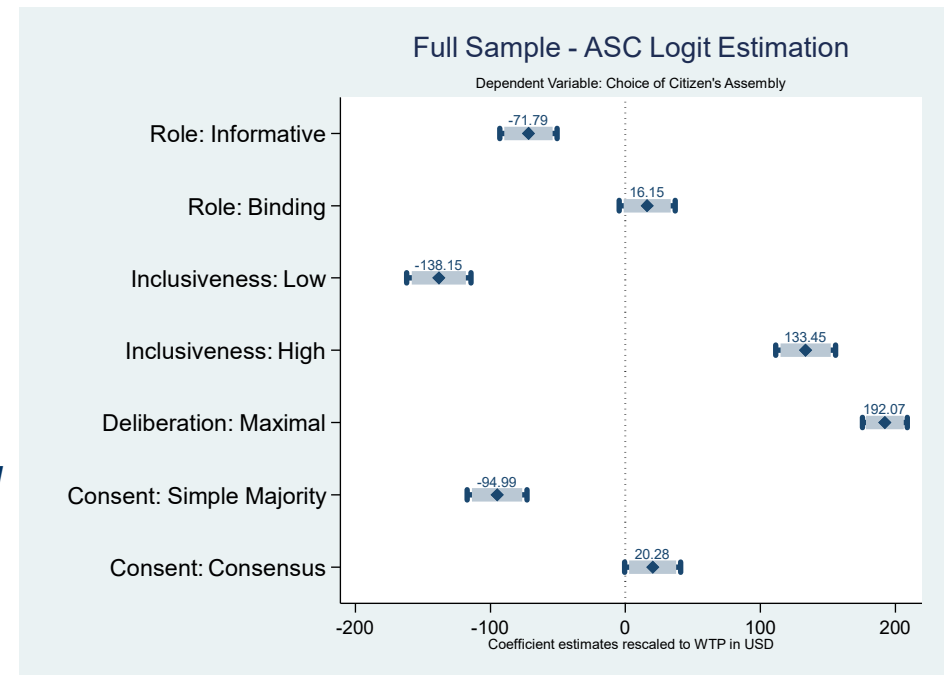
Discrete Choice Experiment – Preliminary Results (1)

All countries pooled:

- Purely informative role is disliked against consultative/binding role.
- Also, simple majority is disliked to the alternatives
- Preferences for increased degrees of inclusiveness and deeper deliberation

“The assembly is a highly accurate reflection of Colombia’s demographics, including strong representation of Indigenous and local communities from the Amazon region”

“The assembly meets for eight weekends over three months, allowing for high participation from both local and international experts. Participants receive comprehensive information and have ample time for in-depth discussions.”



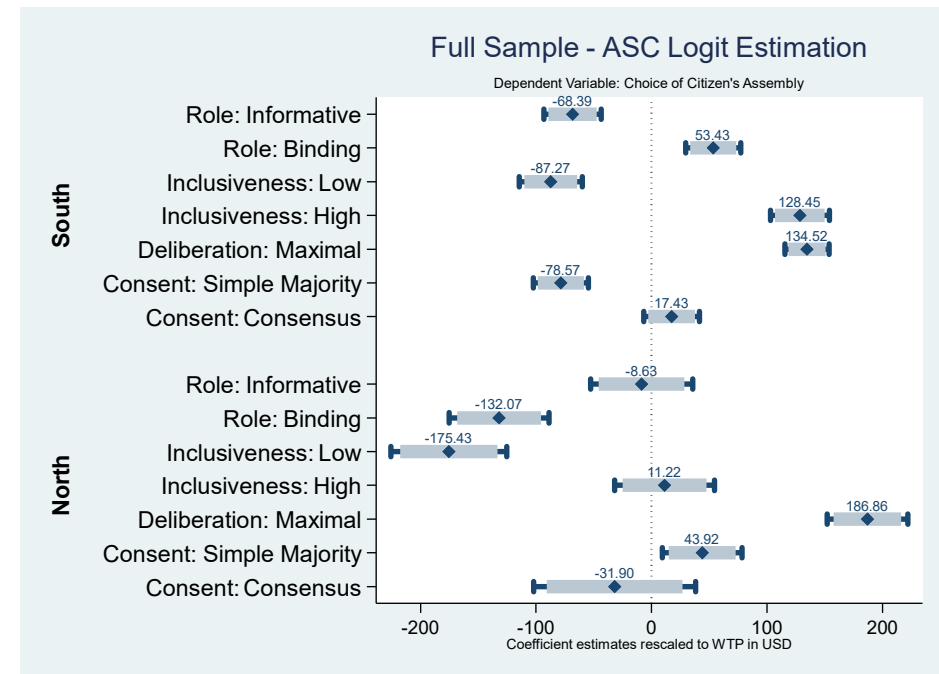
Discrete Choice Experiment – Preliminary Results (2)

Global North/Global South Similarity:

- Maximal deliberation is strongly preferred
- Low inclusiveness strongly disliked

Global North/Global South Difference:

- Analysis reveals that the distaste for an informative role is mainly driven by Latin American countries
- While Latin American countries prefer binding legislative role, it is strongly disliked in the Global North
- The strong preference for a higher degrees of inclusiveness is driven by countries in the Global South
- Aversion against simple majority voting is also driven by the Global South



DISCUSSION

Discussion

- This study extends existing work by introducing a justice-based evaluative framework into the experimental comparison of deliberative formats. Lessons for implementing in the Global South:
 - Focus on inclusiveness, especially for historically marginalized groups (e.g. Indigenous peoples).
 - Preference for more than simple majority and binding outcomes (need clear follow-up)
- In the UK and US, mini-publics are more familiar than in Latin America, while they are perceived to be very just they are not perceived as very legitimate.
 - Legitimacy depends on whether the CAs are viewed as credible, effective, and politically influential. Thus, CA can be fair and desirable in theory (high justice) but their practical role in real policymaking can be doubted.
 - Design matters for legitimacy and is context-dependent (e.g. binding decision, including indigenous groups).
- Interdependence of Survey Experiment and DCE: Inclusiveness of indigenous groups was emphasized in the MSP but omitted in the CA: ... *“was composed of representatives from government, Indigenous communities, environmental NGOs, businesses, and academia.”* → ideally conduct DCE first for all options to choose equally preferred options.