

Let the people rule, but let them talk first.
How deliberative referendums can benefit representative government (DelibRef)

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Referendums have become increasingly popular worldwide. Yet, the idea that voters should decide directly on policies is fiercely controversial. What is undisputable is that referendums can affect a society enormously, with the Brexit referendum being just the most vivid example. Given the increased use of referendums worldwide and their potentially far-reaching consequences, this project asks *how can referendums benefit representative government from a citizen perspective?*

DelibRef addresses this question by focusing on **deliberative referendums**, a key innovation that so far has been mostly confined to theoretical debate. Deliberative referendums combine the benefits of deliberation with the powerful voting device of referendums, making them a scalable intervention with potentially large societal impact. Using a multi-method approach, DelibRef will be the first to test how deliberative referendums influence the perceived legitimacy of representative institutions and citizens' willingness to participate in democratic politics at both national and local level.

The project involves a small team, including the principal investigator, a Postdoctoral fellow, a PhD candidate, and student assistants. The aim is to test deliberative referendums using two devices – mini-publics and information material – in two Subprojects.

In **Subproject 1** we will conduct field experiments in at least one mid-size municipality in Denmark, and, ideally, another mid-size municipality in another country. In the experiment, a group of residents will discuss a policy proposal concerning a relevant issue in a sort of mini-public, and will then vote in a fictional referendum on the proposal. Another group of citizens will simply vote on the proposal without being part of the mini-public. We will then test the effect of deliberative referendums on different outcomes, including trust in institutions and political participation at the local level.

In **Subproject 2** we will conduct survey experiments in six countries/states in Europe, Latin America, and the U.S. Using the method of the Citizens' Initiative Review (CRI), in each country/state we will select small citizen juries that deliberate on a ballot initiative. We will then conduct survey experiments with nationally representative samples in which some respondents will receive the outcome of the citizen juries before voting on the ballot initiative, while others will simply vote without receiving any information. The respondents will then reply to different outcome measures similar to those included in Subproject 1.

The project includes a scientific advisory board with internationally recognized scholars, in addition to a series of outreach activities, such as research visits, international conferences and workshops.