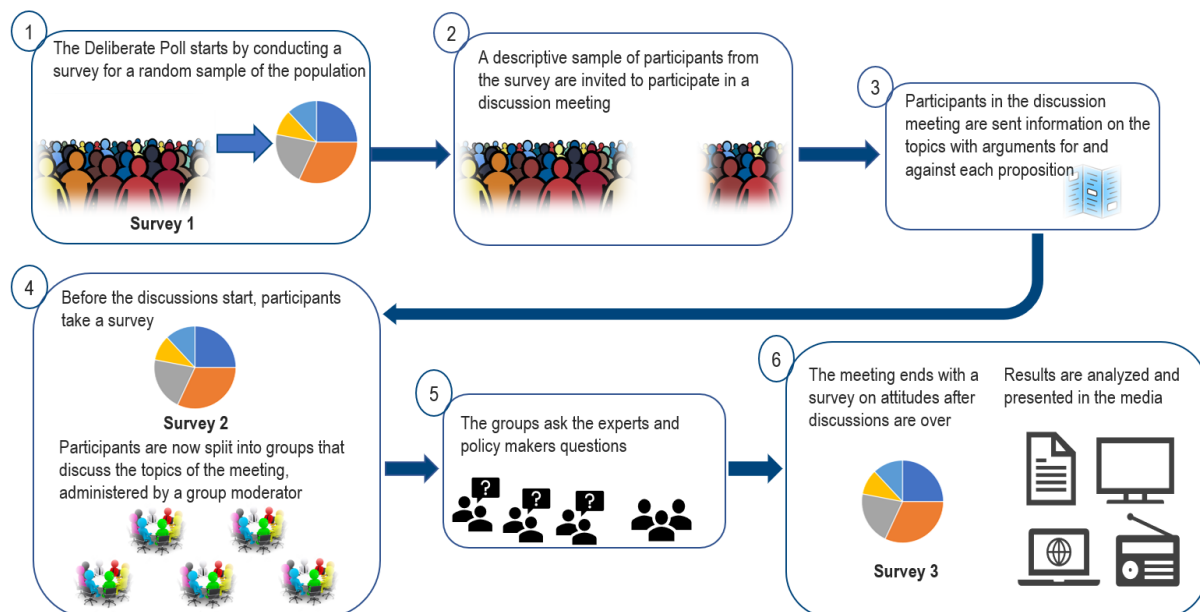




Summary of conclusions of the deliberative poll - public consultation on revision of the Icelandic Constitution

On 9 and 10 November 2019, a round table on the revision of Iceland's Constitution was held in Laugardalshöll. The event was part of the project *Deliberative Poll - Public Consultation on the Revision of the Icelandic Constitution*, which was carried out by the Social Science Research Institute at the University of Iceland in collaboration with the Grant of Excellence project Democratic Constitution Making and the Center for Deliberative Democracy at Stanford University. The goal of the project was twofold. One goal was to examine the attitude of the Icelandic public towards the amendments to the Icelandic Constitution that have been proposed in recent years in connection with the impending revision of the Constitution. The other goal was to investigate whether discussions of the issues and conversations with experts would influence the opinions of participants.

The deliberative poll was divided into six phases, as illustrated in the figure below. First, a random sample of people from the National Registry and the online panel of the Social Science Research Institute answered an opinion poll. Respondents were invited to take part in a round table in Laugardalshöll (2) and those who accepted received information about the topics to be discussed there (3). At the beginning of the round table, participants filled out a questionnaire to gauge their attitude towards the topics (4). Participants were then split into groups to discuss the topics in a systematic manner, taking the pros and cons into account and guided by a group moderator. The meeting also provided an opportunity for participants to ask experts about each topic (5). Following the round table, participants took another opinion poll to see whether their attitudes had changed after further examining and discussing the topics (6).



All group discussions were recorded and secretaries took down the main points discussed at each table. The discussions were divided into six parts where the following topics were discussed: the office of President, referendums, the Court of Impeachment and Parliament's power of indictment, amendments to the Constitution and international co-operation. After each discussion, participants were given the chance to direct questions to three experts. Before and after the meeting, participants answered a survey on their attitudes towards the topics, different values, the political landscape and political participation. What follows is a brief summary of the main conclusions of the deliberative poll.

The office of President of Iceland

Following the round table, a majority of participants (77%) fully agreed, strongly agreed or agreed somewhat with the statement that the role of President should remain unchanged, and that the President should represent the nation and be above politics (86%). Moreover, the majority fully agreed, strongly agreed or agreed somewhat with the statement that turnover of elected officials is an important part of democracy and that there should be term limits for the office of President (72%).

When comparing the answers of participants before and after the round table, some shifts in attitude can be observed. Before the discussions, the majority of participants (63%) agreed that the age limit to run for President should remain unchanged, but fewer agreed with the criteria following the discussions (53%). A considerable number of participants changed their opinion on the election of President. Before the round table, more than half of participants (56%) fully agreed, strongly agreed or agreed somewhat that the President should continue to be elected in the current manner, i.e. by a simple majority election, but after the round table, the ratio was down to 40% of participants. After the round table, a higher proportion of participants were in favour of a transferable vote system (56%) than before the round table. Such an arrangement ensures that the President is supported by a majority of voters. Before the round table, more than half of the participants (56%) considered a transferable vote system to be complicated, as voters do not only have to select candidates but also rank them. After the round table, a lower proportion (41%) held this opinion.

The Court of Impeachment and Parliament's power of indictment

There was a significant shift in attitudes towards the Court of Impeachment and Parliament's power to indict ministers for violations of the Ministerial Accountability Act. Prior to the discussions, 52% of participants fully agreed, strongly agreed or agreed somewhat that the arrangement should remain as it is, but 21% held this view after the discussions. A much higher proportion believed that Parliament's power of indictment should be abolished, along with the Court of Impeachment after the discussions (55%) than before (24%). Participants were also asked whether they believed that Parliament's power of indictment and the Court of Impeachment are necessary so the public can be assured that proceedings against the executive branch are fair and impartial. Only about a third of participants agreed with this after the round table. The majority of participants fully agreed, strongly agreed or agreed somewhat that Parliament's power of indictment and the Court of Impeachment could be misused for political purposes (79%).

In the group discussions, participants seemed to view Parliament's power of indictment with suspicion. Many also believed that it was not appropriate for members of Parliament to

decided whether current or former colleagues or political opponents should be prosecuted, and that this carried a risk of politically motivated abuse of power.

Provisions on amendments to the Constitution

After the discussion, the majority of participants fully agreed, strongly agreed or agreed somewhat that amendments to the Constitution should always be approved in a referendum (82%). More than half (59%) also believed that amendments to the Constitution should continue to need the approval of two consecutive parliamentary assemblies. Almost all agreed that it must not be so easy to amend the Constitution that political parties may do so for partisan purposes (96%), and that there should be a general national consensus on amendments to the Constitution (95%).

There was minimal change in the attitudes of participants to provisions on amendments to the Constitution following the round table. At the conclusion of discussions, slightly fewer (14%) agreed that an increased parliamentary majority (2/3) should be able to amend the Constitution in a single vote than before the discussions (19%).

Referendum and public initiatives

Following the round table, only 6% of participants fully disagreed, strongly disagreed or disagreed somewhat that the Constitution should continue to provide the President with an avenue to put newly passed legislation to a referendum. The majority of participants (83%) believed that referendum should generally be binding for the government, while only 8% believed that the results of referendum should only be advisory.

About 80% of participants agreed that the public should be able to demand a referendum on new legislation, provided that such a demand was supported by a particular percentage of the electorate. Over half (59%) agreed that a certain proportion of voters should be able to submit a parliament issue (i.e. a “national initiative”). After the discussions, the percentage of those who felt that the public should be able to demand a referendum on general issues, not just new legislation, had dropped from 57% to 44%. Prior to the round table, more than half of participants (54%) disagreed that anything could be put to a referendum, but the percentage grew to 66% following the discussions.

Electoral districts, vote weight and personalised vote

There were some changes in attitudes towards personalised voting, electoral districts and vote weight during the round table. Prior to the discussions, 26% said that they fully agreed, strongly agreed or agreed somewhat that electoral districts should remain as they are, but 36% once the discussions had been concluded. Furthermore, 73% of participants agreed that it is important that the country’s division into electoral districts ensures that all parts of the country are represented in Parliament, which is a higher percentage than before the discussions (66%). After the discussions, more participants agreed that the equal weight of votes was the most important change to be brought about by a change in electoral districts, 68% compared to 60% before the discussions.

Prior to the round table, a total of 65% of participants agreed that parliamentary and municipal elections should remain party-based but allow for increased personalised voting, but the total had increased to 80% following the discussions. Following the discussions, a

lower proportion of participants believed that parliamentary and municipal elections should be based on personalised voting (43% after the round table, compared to 55% before). After the discussions, 75% of participants agreed that it was important for voters to have more influence on the selection of officials than provided for by the current rules, e.g. by being able to rank party candidates or voting across party lines.

International co-operation and delegation of competences

There was a significant shift in participants' attitudes to constitutional amendments due to international co-operation. Participants were asked about the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the statement that Iceland's Constitution must be amended to allow for any international obligations that the government may have to undertake. 45% of participants agreed with the statement prior to the discussions, but 66% once they had concluded. After the discussions, there was an increase in the proportion of those who agreed that decisions to implement international agreements must be made according to clearly defined rules, independent of political disputes: from 83% to 92%. The proportion of those who believed that one of the most important functions of the Constitution was to safeguard the nation's sovereignty decreased, from 87% before the round table to 81%.

Values

Participants were given a list of some common moral and social values, and they were asked to assess how well Icelandic society reflected each value on a scale of 0 to 10. It is noteworthy that after the round table, participants were slightly more likely to believe that almost all the values had been successfully implemented in society. The values that the participants believed had been most successfully implemented were freedom, human rights, democracy and equality. Participants were also asked to assess the importance of seven different statements, as they pertained to themselves and society as a whole. Almost all found it most important that everyone has equal access to health service and that no one should be homeless or go hungry. The ability to earn as much income as possible was deemed least important.

Political participation and political landscape

After the discussions, a majority of participants agreed that their political views were worth listening to (84%). More than a third of participants (37%) agreed that most public policy issues were so complicated that a person like themselves had difficulties understanding them. After the discussions, there was a significant increase in those who disagreed with the statement "People like me don't have any say about what the government does", from 44% to 56%.