



How does diversity among witnesses in deliberative mini-publics affect citizen perceptions of legitimacy?

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Solutions



Deliberative mini-publics (DMPs)

- Deliberation among group of citizens representative of the population
- Principles: democracy, deliberation (vs contestation/conflict)
- Potential for solving political issues, strengthening democracy, and improving democratic legitimacy (e.g. Elstub and McLaverty 2014; Fishkin 2018) – although also criticised because unelected
- Exist at different levels (local to supra-national), with different degrees of authority, and different policy areas
- Examples:
 - Climate Assemblies across the UK
 - Citizens Assembly on abortion in Ireland
 - Participatory budgeting
 - <https://www.involve.org.uk/resources/methods>



Source: Leeds Media Services



Source: Climate Assembly UK

Deliberative mini-publics and EDI

- Emphasis on inclusivity, accessibility, and representativeness among participating citizens (e.g. Farrell et al. 2019)
- Ideal selection process: sortition (random selection) – or, more often, quotas
- Take steps to mitigate financial, time, access, and other barriers:

About Climate Assembly UK ▼ Underpinning principles ▼ How we travel on land ▼

A.3 Access, inclusion and wellbeing

Access and inclusion were key considerations throughout the assembly.¹⁵ Prior to the first weekend, they influenced decisions such as our venue choice (a fully accessible venue), the venue's location, and the timings of the events. We gave assembly members an honorarium of £150 per weekend¹⁶ for their participation, as well as covering their travel, accommodation and food/drink. Where relevant we covered costs such as childcare and the attendance of parents/guardians. We paid all costs relating to assembly members bringing carers with them to the weekends. We also met other access needs by, for example, providing hearing loops, headsets and materials in large print.

Expert witnesses in deliberative mini-publics

- Provide technical expertise, advocacy, and lived experience
- Instrumental in informing outcomes (decisions, recommendations)
- But: expertise is rarely entirely 'objective' or independent from personal experience: priorities and views may be influenced by background and experiences
- Moreover, messenger affects how the message is received
- We argue: equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) considerations when selecting experts matter for the **quality of outcomes** as well as the **normative** and **perceived legitimacy** of the process



Source: [Guardian](#)

Scotland's Climate Assembly (2021, online)

- 101 speakers/experts



Name	Organisation	Daisy Narayanan	Sustrans
Dr Alan Renwick	UCL	Dr Dan Barlow	ECCI
Dr Alastair McInroy	Mobility as a Service (MaaS), Technology Scotland	Professor Dave Reay	University of Edinburgh
Prof. Alice Larkin	Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research	David Harkin	Historic Environment Scotland
Amanda Grimm	Creative Carbon	David Symons	WSP (professional services)
Dr Amanda Thomson	UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology	Debbie Adams	The Conservation Volunteers
Ameena Camps	Uist Wind	Deborah Long	Scottish Environment LINK
Dr Andy Kerr	Climate-KIC	Professor Deirdre Shaw	University of Glasgow
Andy Smith	Loganair	Eilidh Watson	Young Royal Scottish Geographical Society
Anna Beswick	Adaptation Scotland, Sniffer	Elizabeth Leighton	Existing Homes Alliance
Dr Anna Birney	Forum for the Future	Ellie Harrison	Get Glasgow Moving
Dr Anna Gyrka-Macphail	Obesity Action Group, Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow	Fabrice Leveque	Climate Emergency Response Group, WWF Scotland
Anna Hughes	Flight Free UK	Heather Claridge	Architecture & Design Scotland
Anna Richardson	Councillor, Glasgow	Hywel Lloyd	Active Building Centre
Arabella Kennard	Community Energy Scotland	Professor Iain Docherty	University of Stirling
Ben Twist	Creative Carbon	Iain Gulland	Zero Waste Scotland
Bruce Wilson	Scottish Wildlife Trust		

Expert witnesses in policymaking processes

- Wider relevance: expert witnesses also play important role in other institutions, e.g. oral evidence sessions in parliaments and parliamentary committees



Evidence session of HoC Modernisation Committee, 17/6/2025
Source: Parliament TV



Chamber and committees

Witness diversity: a guide for organisations

Why parliament values diversity

What is witness diversity?

Selecting a committee witness

“if there are multiple people within the organisation who have the appropriate knowledge or experience, could you select someone who is part of an underrepresented group?”

<https://www.parliament.scot/chamber-and-committees/committees/witness-diversity/why-parliament-values-diversity#topOfNav>

“We are all too aware that neither Parliament itself nor the witnesses we hear from week after week reflect the diversity of Scottish society. Those watching from outside may see this and feel that participation in democracy is not for “people like me”. Parliament is not alone in facing these challenges, but we have a crucial role in leading the way, demonstrating that people from all backgrounds and experiences can contribute their views and expertise to public life.

Increasing the diversity of committee witnesses is one part of a much wider strategy to create a Parliament which is welcoming to people from all walks of life as a place to work, visit and engage with.”

EDI among expert witnesses in DMPs

Do organisers of DMPs take EDI considerations into account in their expert witness recruitment?

➤ Our research suggests that they do not – at least they don't report it (Roberts et al. 2022)

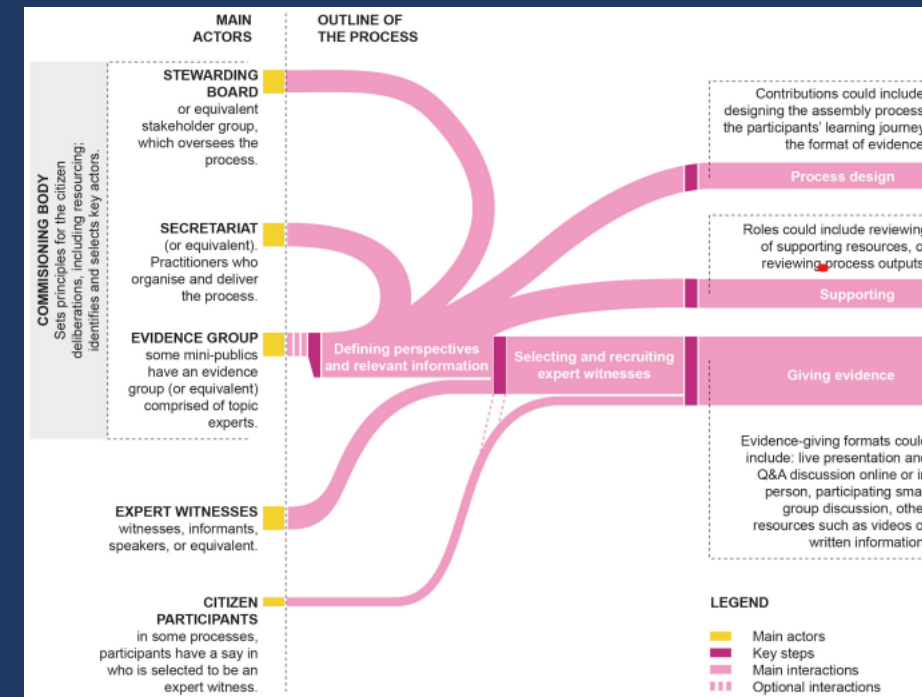
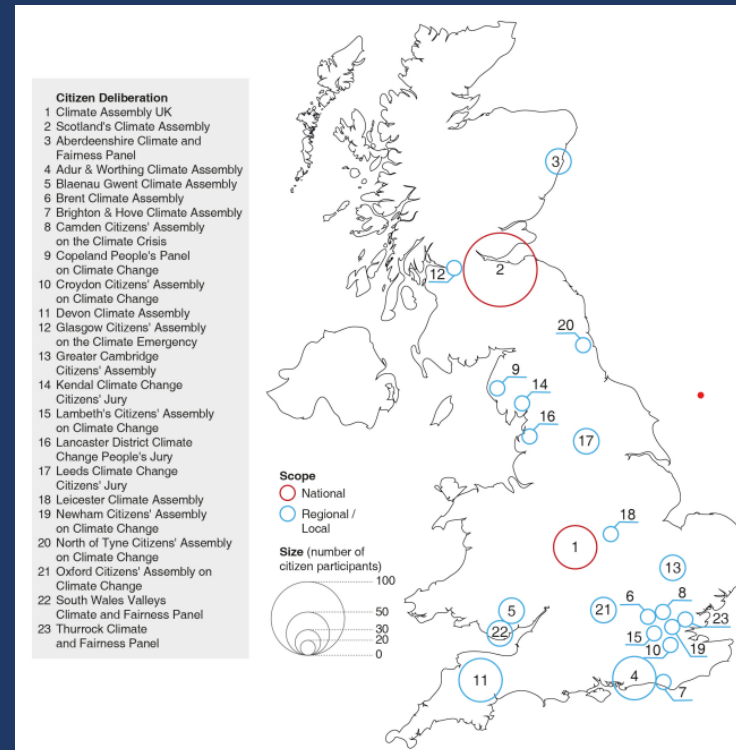
Research Brief

Inclusion and diversity among expert witnesses in deliberative mini-publics

This policy brief has been written by: Dr Jennifer J Roberts¹, Hannah Salamon², Dr Marco Reggiani¹, Dr Ruth Lightbody³, Dr Stefanie Reher⁴, Clara Pirie⁴

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➤ Does this affect how the public perceives DMPs?

Research questions

1. Are citizen perceptions of the democratic legitimacy of DMPs affected by...
 - (a) whether **protocols** are in place to ensure EDI among witnesses?
 - (b) whether the **composition** of witness panels is diverse?
2. Do these effects vary with citizens' **political ideology** and **minoritised group identity**?
3. Are the effects of EDI stronger when the policy issue is related to **equality**?

Hypotheses

1. Effects of EDI procedures and diversity among witnesses

H1: Positive effects on perceived legitimacy of...

(a) *procedures* promoting EDI among witnesses and

(b) actual *diversity*

- Evidence that citizens value diversity and representation in politics, e.g. for elected representatives

H1c: The positive effect of the *diversity* of experts is *stronger* than the positive effect of *EDI procedures*.

- Evidence that citizens emphasise outcomes more than procedures

Hypotheses

2. Conditioning effects of citizen ideology

H2a: Effect of EDI procedures is *positive* among left-leaning citizens and *negative* among right-leaning citizens.

- Support for state intervention to achieve equality on the left; belief in merit-based society on the right

H2b: Effect of diversity among experts is *more strongly positive* among left-leaning citizens than among right-leaning citizens.

H2c: Among right-leaning citizens diversity among experts only positively affects perceptions of legitimacy *when there are no EDI procedures*.

- Support only for merit-based equality on the right

Hypotheses

3. Conditioning effects of citizen minoritised identity

H3: The positive effects of EDI procedures and diversity among experts on perceived legitimacy are stronger among citizens from minoritised groups (women, people of colour, disabled people, sexual minorities).

- Self-interest and stronger preference for equality

4. Conditioning effect of policy issue

H4: The positive effects of EDI procedures and diversity among experts on perceived legitimacy are stronger when the issue is explicitly equality-related.

- Representation likely perceived as more important and consequential

Research design

- Vignette survey experiment with 3x3 factorial design, conducted online among representative sample of UK citizens (N=2,000) through YouGov
- Dimensions:
 1. **EDI protocols for witnesses:** present / not present / not reported
 2. **Diversity of witnesses:** high / low / not reported
 3. **Equality issue:** yes / no (one each per respondent, randomised)
- Outcome: legitimacy perceptions
- Common approach in political science
- Design allows identifying causal effects of EDI protocols and diversity on legitimacy perceptions



Vignette: no equality issue / EDI protocols / low diversity

The UK Government is launching a new Citizen Assembly on how to **improve air quality and decrease pollution caused by traffic**.

The Assembly brings together 100 ordinary members of the public, chosen at random and representative of the population by age, ethnicity, gender, household income, etc. They get together across four weekends to deliberate and develop policy recommendations for parliament on how to **improve air quality and decrease pollution caused by traffic**. To inform their decisions, the participants hear evidence and arguments from a number of experts on the topic, including academics and representatives of charities and interest groups. The experts were selected so as to provide a balance between different views on the topic.

Efforts were also made to invite experts who are diverse and inclusive in terms of their demographics and identities (such as their gender, race, and ethnicity, disability, and sexuality), and protocols were in place to eliminate barriers that might prevent experts from under-represented groups from attending.

The pool of experts who attended was not diverse. For example, most experts were male and white, and no disabled people were included.

Vignette: equality issue / no EDI protocols / high diversity

The UK Government is launching a new Citizen Assembly on how to **tackle inequalities in healthcare**.

The Assembly brings together 100 ordinary members of the public, chosen at random and representative of the population by age, ethnicity, gender, household income, etc. They get together across four weekends to deliberate and develop policy recommendations for parliament on how to **tackle inequalities in healthcare**. To inform their decisions, the participants hear evidence and arguments from a number of experts on the topic, including academics and representatives of charities and interest groups. The experts were selected so as to provide a balance between different views on the topic.

The demographics and identities of experts (such as their gender, race, and ethnicity, disability, and sexuality) did not play a role in this selection, and no protocols were in place to eliminate barriers that might prevent experts from under-represented groups from attending.

The pool of experts who attended was inclusive of different backgrounds and social identities. For example, it was balanced in terms of gender, race and ethnicity, and included several disabled people.

Vignette: equality issue / EDI protocols not mentioned / no diversity info

The UK Government is launching a new Citizen Assembly on how to **tackle inequalities in healthcare**.

The Assembly brings together 100 ordinary members of the public, chosen at random and representative of the population by age, ethnicity, gender, household income, etc. They get together across four weekends to deliberate and develop policy recommendations for parliament on how to **tackle inequalities in healthcare**. To inform their decisions, the participants hear evidence and arguments from a number of experts on the topic, including academics and representatives of charities and interest groups. The experts were selected so as to provide a balance between different views on the topic.

The organisers did not provide information about the demographics and identities of the group of experts who attended.

Dependent variable

- **Perceived procedural legitimacy** of the described citizen assembly (cf. Clayton et al. 2019; Rasmussen & Reher 2023)

Additive scale (1-5 agreement scales):

1. “The set-up and organisation of the Assembly are fair.”
2. “The Assembly takes all relevant views into account.”
3. “The Assembly is organised in a democratic way.”

Results

- H1a-b: Perceived legitimacy increases when EDI protocols are in place (0.14 on 1-5 legitimacy scale) and when the group of witnesses is diverse (0.57).
- H1c: The effect of witness diversity is stronger than the effect of EDI protocols.

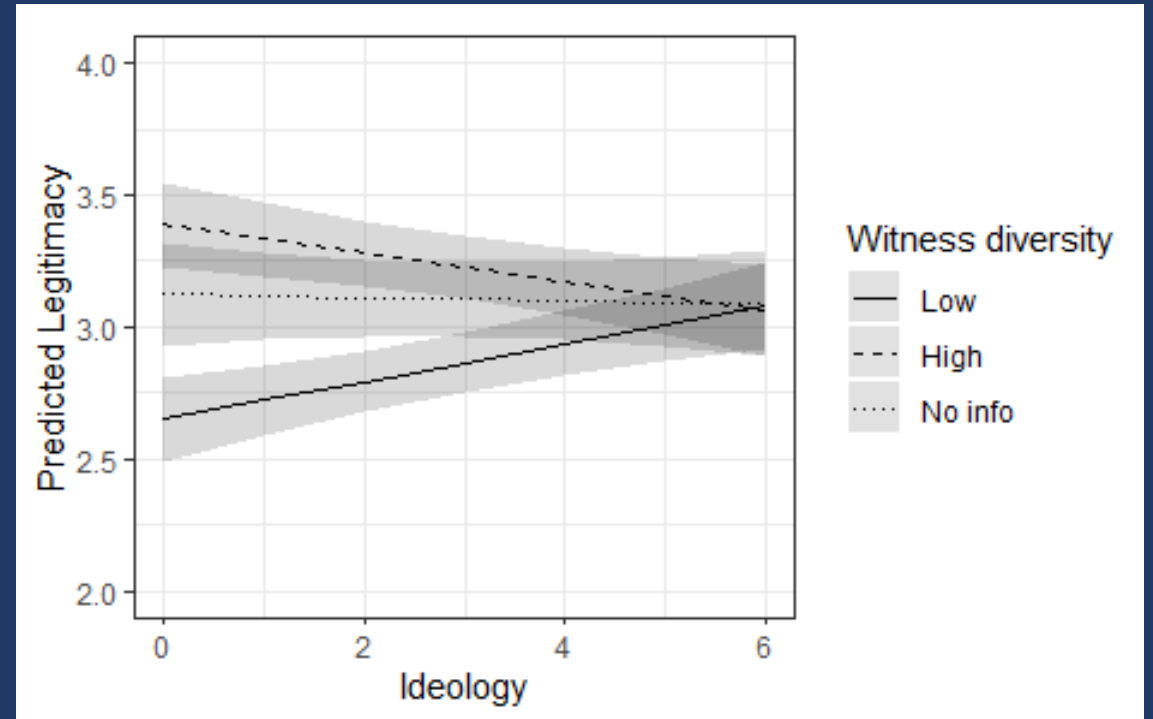
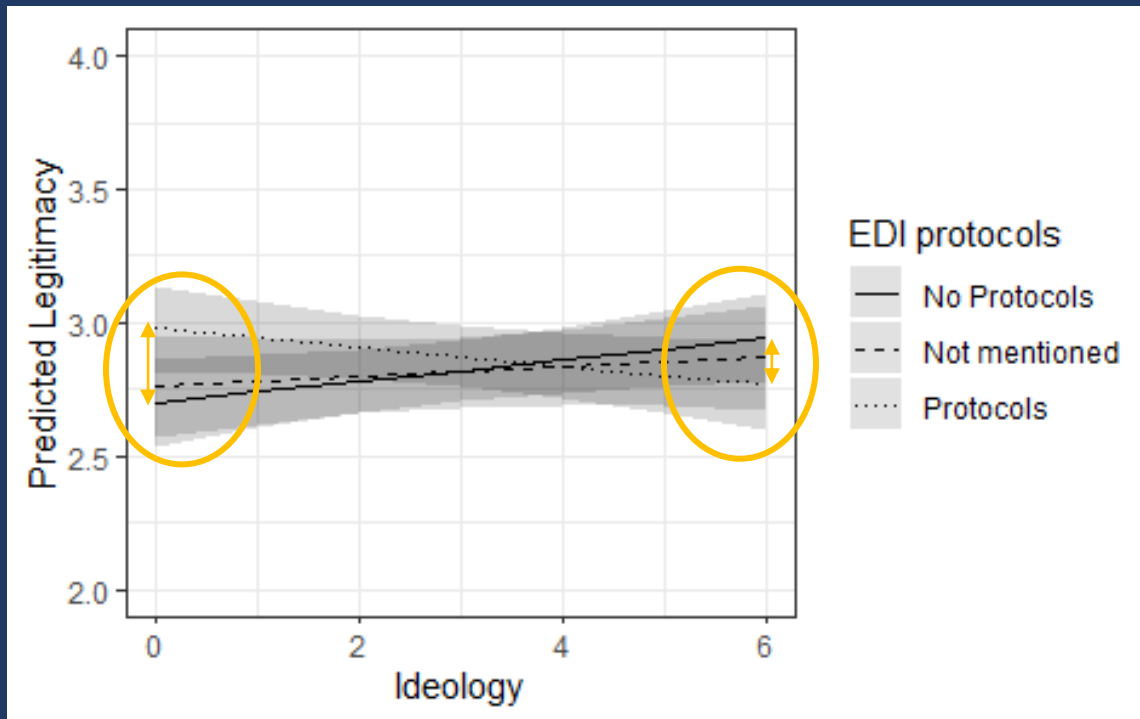
Table 1. Effects of EDI protocols and witness diversity on perceived legitimacy

EDI protocols (ref = not in place)	
Not mentioned	0.028 (0.044)
Protocols in place	0.139*** (0.039)
Witness diversity (ref=low)	
High	0.569*** (0.039)
No info	0.343*** (0.046)
Constant	2.745*** (0.040)
Observations	3,758
Adjusted R ²	0.072

Notes: Estimates from linear regression models with respondent clustered standard errors. *p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001

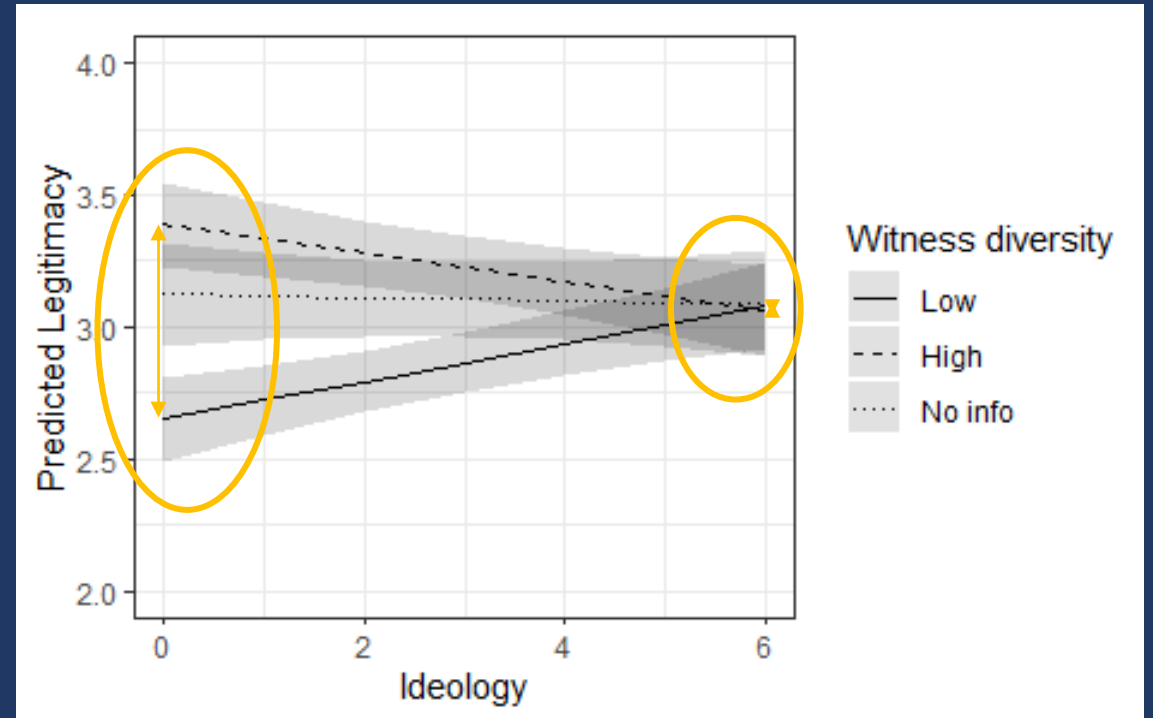
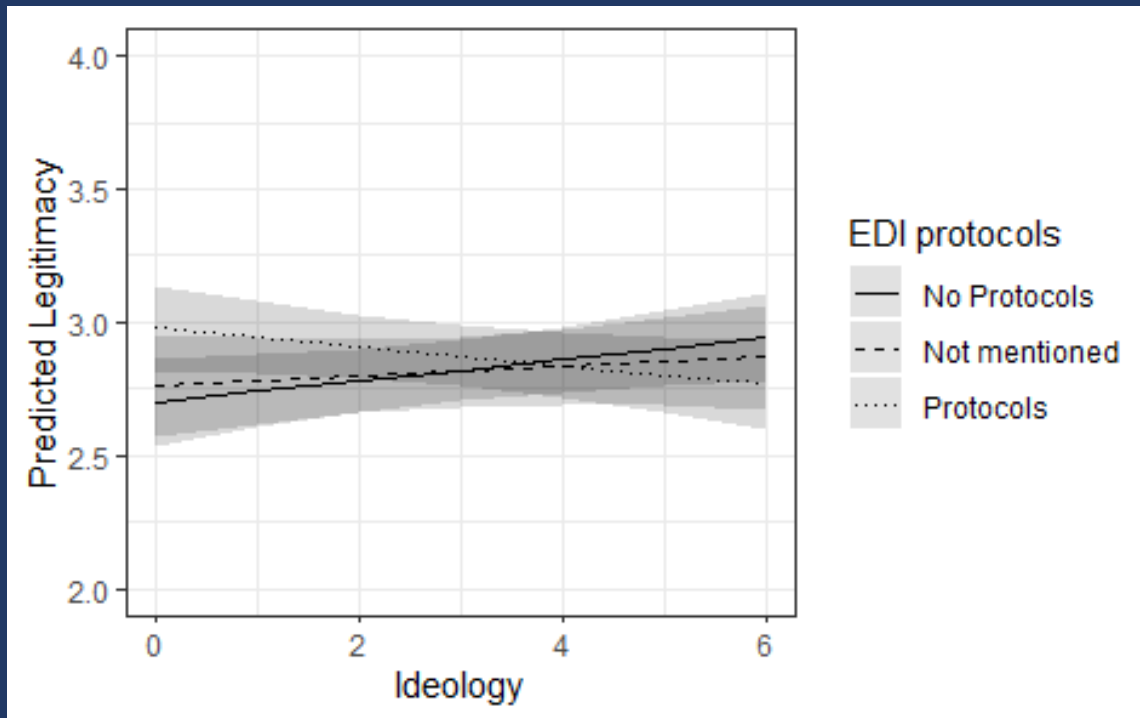
Results

- H2a: *EDI procedures* positively affect legitimacy among left-wing citizens and have no effect (rather than the hypothesised negative effect) among right-wing citizens.



Results

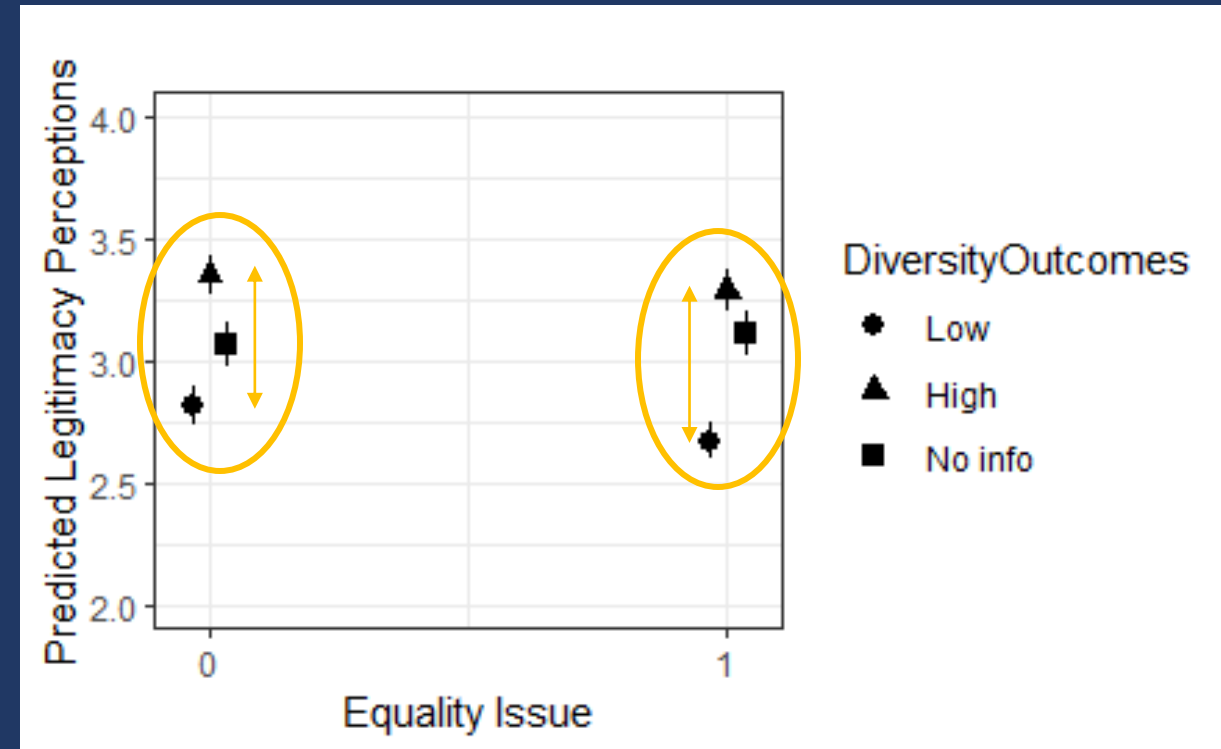
- H2a: *EDI procedures* positively affect legitimacy among left-wing citizens and have no effect (rather than the hypothesised negative effect) among right-wing citizens.
- H2b: *Witness diversity* positively affects legitimacy among left-wing citizens but has no effect among right-wing citizens.



- H2c: Among right-wing citizens, *diversity* doesn't have a positive effect, whether or not *EDI procedures* are in place.

Results

- H3: The effect of *EDI protocols* is not stronger among citizens with a minoritized identity – but the effect of *witness diversity* is. This is primarily driven by gender identity.
- H4: The effect of *EDI protocols* on legitimacy only exists for equality issues, whereas the effect of *diversity* exists regardless of issue type



Conclusions

- Citizens care about **who** is involved in political decision-making processes, including as expert witnesses in mini-publics.
- They care about the representation of different social groups among witnesses → this suggests that they don't perceive expertise as objective and independent from the expert's identity and experiences.
- The public care more about actual diversity than procedures to promote diversity
- These attitudes vary across the ideological spectrum, whereas minoritised identities do not condition them, except gender.
 - Why? → the variation might be captured by ideology, or identities aren't salient in this context
- Our findings have implications for the recruitment of expert witnesses in mini-publics as well as other political processes, e.g. oral evidence-giving in parliament.

Thanks for listening!

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Source: Mike Davis / Sortition Foundation

APPENDIX

Vignette text

The UK Government is launching a new Citizen Assembly on how to <improve air quality and decrease pollution caused by traffic> / <tackle inequalities in healthcare>.

The Assembly brings together 100 ordinary members of the public, chosen at random and representative of the population by age, ethnicity, gender, household income, etc. They get together across four weekends to deliberate and develop policy recommendations for parliament on <how to improve air quality and decrease pollution caused by traffic / how to tackle inequalities in healthcare>. To inform their decisions, the participants hear evidence and arguments from a number of experts on the topic, including academics and representatives of charities and interest groups. The experts were selected so as to provide a balance between different views on the topic.

<Efforts were also made to invite experts who are diverse and inclusive in terms of their demographics and identities (such as their gender, race, and ethnicity, disability, and sexuality), and protocols were in place to eliminate barriers that might prevent experts from under-represented groups from attending.> /

<The demographics and identities of experts (such as their gender, race, and ethnicity, disability, and sexuality) did not play a role in this selection, and no protocols were in place to eliminate barriers that might prevent experts from under-represented groups from attending.> /

<NO TEXT>

<The pool of experts who attended was not diverse. For example, most experts were male and white, and no disabled people were included.>

<The pool of experts who attended was not as diverse as the organisers had hoped. For example, most experts were male and white, and no disabled people were included.>

<The organisers did not provide information about the demographics and identities of the group of experts who attended.>